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STUDIES AND RECORDS

VOLUME III

PUBLISHED BY THE
NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

STUDIES AND RECORDS

VOLUME III

PUBLISHED BY THE
NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA
1928

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PREFACE

The time is near at hand when a documentary history of American immigration must be made available for students of that mighty and complex folk wandering. When such a *magnum opus* is planned, a large place will undoubtedly be given to "America letters" and "America books," for they are luminous revealers of the mind of the immigrant in its reactions to the European situation, to the process of transition, and to the difficulties of adjustment to American surroundings. As one ranges over unpublished and published materials in this field one finds everywhere, standing out in relief, the record of a debate. On the one side were those who opposed emigration, on the other those who favored it; and into their debate went argument, informed opinion, prejudice and ignorance, traditional choices and loyalties, discontents, blind longings, stirring ambitions, the sharp tug of blood and language and home, — all the widely ramifying forces that touch and influence and are affected by human migration on a large scale. The story of this clash of ideas merges with the larger story of a popular movement of great magnitude, and this in turn becomes an intimate part of the broad social history both of the Old World and of the New.

Several documents illustrating this common people's debate are published in the present volume. These relate to the immigration from Norway and have been turned into English from the Norwegian. They include a letter by a disillusioned immigrant whose testimony was spread broadcast by a bishop who on his own account had issued a philippic aimed at the strange madness that had entered the hearts of many commoners in southwestern Norway. They include a letter by a "doctrinaire idealist," beneath whose praise of America smolders resentment over injustice and inequality in a Europe that had not achieved Utopia through revolution. They include extracts from letters by fair-minded immigrants seeking consciously and through organized effort to refute what they considered misrepresentation of America by hostile critics. They

include letters that tell naïvely of the marvelous experiences that accompanied the exchange of one world for another. And they include an argument against emigration by a Norwegian who recognized the need of modernizing agricultural methods in Norway about the middle of the nineteenth century. These documents will help students to piece out the history of Norwegian immigration to the United States; perhaps they will also have a wider interest for those who desire to understand the European emigration of the last century. The Norwegian-American Historical Association is collecting "America letters" and "America books" both in Norway and in America, and it would like to encourage the collection of similar and related materials for other emigrant streams in the larger flow of European emigration.

In addition to six documentary contributions, this volume contains three formal articles. One is a plea for the preservation of a special kind of documentary source, — the church records of the Norwegian-Americans. One tells the life story of a mid-western *landnamsman*, who was not unlike the "land-takers" of the sagas in his combination of force of character with generous cultural interests; his story is a chapter in the social history of the American West. The last article is a soaring survey of the Icelandic communities of America and of the special elements in their backgrounds that go so far to explain their present characteristics.

Theodore C. Blegen

Minnesota Historical Society
St. Paul

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STUDIES AND RECORDS

VOLUME III

THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF AN IMMIGRANT

Sjur Jørgensen Haaeim's "Information on Conditions in North America"

Translated and Edited by Gunnar J. Malmin

INTRODUCTION

In volume 1 of the Norwegian-American Historical Association's Studies and Records an English translation was published of Bishop Jacob Neuman's *Word of Admonition to the Peasants,* a philippic against emigration originally brought out in Norway in 1837. Sjur Jørgensen Haaeim's ten-page pamphlet, entitled *Information on Conditions in North America,* which was published at Christiania in 1842, was probably put into print as a result of Neumann's efforts. In fact it is likely that the bishop himself revised the manuscript. It will be noted in the text that certain parts of the author's original manuscript are omitted, and in their place are brief summaries in brackets, supplied by someone else.

The reason for supposing the publication of this pamphlet to be the work of Bishop Neumann is not only the general fact that he had previously, through the publication of his own *Word of Admonition,* showed a special interest in discouraging emigration, but more specifically the fact that he had published, in 1839, a letter from Syver Jørgensen Haajem (undoubtedly identical with our author), written in Illinois on April 22, 1839. This letter appeared in *Bergens Stiftstidende,* in *Tiden* (published at Drammen), and probably also in other Norwegian newspapers.

In this letter Haaeim, or Haajem, relates that he emigrated from Hardanger in 1836. He gives a very mournful account of the difficulties he and many other Norwegians have encountered and expresses his earnest desire to return home to Norway. He even asks if a collection cannot be taken up in Norway to help pay his passage. He states that some emigrated from Norway on account of their hatred of the clergy

and of others in authority, others on account of bitterness toward their neighbors, or even on account of crimes and offenses committed in their home communities. "When all these people get together in one community you can easily imagine what goes on in these American forests. There isn't a church within a hundred miles and we are thrown into the midst of the worst heathendom in the world. A few individuals had decided to return to Norway, but they died last fall; if they had succeeded in getting home I don't think quite so many Norwegians would have emigrated thereafter. I have so much to tell the Norwegian people that I haven't room for it all. I therefore ask that you tell all my brethren in Christ not even to think of coming here; I assure them that they will regret it, unless they are completely reckless in every respect. I am now suffering from poverty, and many with me, mostly on account of sickness."[1]

[TITLE PAGE]

Information on Conditions in North America, especially concerning the Welfare of the Norwegian Emigrants, written by the Norwegian Farmer, Sjur Jørgensen Haaeim of Graven's Parish in Hardanger, who emigrated but returned to Norway. Christiania, 1842. Published by Chr. Grøndahl.

[TEXT]

[The author's manuscript begins with a detailed description of his journey from his home, the "gaard" Haaeim of Graven's Parish in Hardanger, but, as this description cannot be presumed to have more than ordinary interest for the reader, we shall merely relate that he and his family, together with a number of other Norwegian emigrants, went by way of Gothenburg, where they had to pay thirty dollars in passage-money for each adult and provide themselves with food and water for three months, which entailed no little expense; and that the voyage was impeded for eight days by icebergs.]

After a voyage of five weeks and four days we reached our destination, New York, where I at once looked up a man by

[1] *Tiden* (Drammen), March 15, 1840.

the name of Frederik Wang, from Gudbrandsdalen, who lives in New York; one of the Swedish sailors on the vessel we came on went with me. When we reached the house we found the man standing on the doorstep; I greeted him and he immediately said that as I was a Norwegian I must come in. He had a saloon, where he sold all kinds of drinks. Here I was treated most generously with wine, brandy, and beer, and when I told him that there were many of us Norwegians in the party and that we had come with the idea of settling here in this country, he asked where our ship was anchored and he promised to go with us to the ship in order to talk with all the Norwegians who were with us. On the way to the ship he stopped at a baker's shop and bought a dollar's worth of bread, which he distributed among all the Norwegians, and he arranged with the captain to have us live on board the ship until he could provide for our passage. We remained three days on the ship, and during this period occurred the celebration which takes place every year on the Fourth of July, the day the Americans won their independence from England and formed a union of their own. This day is the most festive day of the year, and many things could be told about what occurred that day but that would take too much space.

[After having described the journey from New York to Chicago by river-boat, railway, and steamship, the author continues:]

After a voyage of thirteen days across Lake Erie we arrived at Chicago, where part of our group had to remain because they had no money left to continue their journey. From Chicago to the place in Illinois where the Norwegians have settled is a distance of sixty English miles by country road; we therefore rented horses and wagons, and after three days' journey we at length reached our destination, Medelport, where the Norwegians have settled.[2] Everyone can imagine the longing we felt to meet countrymen in this distant land, and at the same time to see the end of all our

2 Obviously the Fox River settlement in the northeastern part of La Salle County, established in 1834 under the leadership of Cleng Peerson by a number of the sloop immigrants of 1825. Medelport may refer to Millington, in the adjacent Kendall County.

troubles and the embarrassments we had experienced on account of the language.

But how surprised we became as we approached their miserable dwellings, which we, to judge by all the glowing descriptions we had heard, had expected to find in far better condition. Now there weren't enough houses to afford lodging to us all for the winter; we were therefore obliged to build three houses of the humble kind in use there, and thus we obtained lodging for the winter. We soon found out that all the land thereabouts was taken, and, as we had come with the sole purpose of acquiring a piece of land, of which we had been told there was such an abundance, we now found fresh cause for worry. The end of it all was that we had to go out among strangers and earn the necessary means of support for our families, and we worked there the whole winter. When spring approached we hired a man from the Stavanger district, one of the first emigrants, by the name of Kleng Pederson Hesthammer,[3] who knew the language and had much knowledge of conditions in the country. This man made a tour of investigation for us and came back and reported that he had found plenty of good land on the west side of the Mississippi River. In the first part of May we started out again and hired a Norwegian to drive us to Ottawa, where we embarked on a steamship and traveled three hundred English miles down the Illinois River to St. Louis. There we took another steamship, which went up the Mississippi, and then we still had a distance of sixty miles across country to the end of our journey, and again we had to hire horses and wagons, for which we paid twenty-five dollars. Now we had arrived in the wilderness and at our destination, and we had to start by setting up a hut, in which we made our simple dwelling until we could get settled and each of us take into use his own piece of land before the auction on the land took place. After a few days each one of us marked out his own piece and started to cut timber for a house, and, with great difficulty, we struggled along a little over a year; then we could see what

[3] Cleng Peerson, famous in the history of Norwegian immigration as the advance agent of the sloop immigration of 1825 and as a guide to later immigrants to the Middle West.

the desert gave us. Here we had a distance of fifty English miles to the nearest mill, and twenty-five miles to the nearest town, and that consisted only of two stores, a saloon, a restaurant, and a blacksmith shop. The name of the town was Skjelbyveld,[4] and the place where we had settled was called Skjelbycountry, in the state of Missouri. When we had been there a year, we found it quite impossible to remain any longer and so we returned to Illinois, where I had spent the first winter. There I bought a piece of woodland for which I paid a hundred dollars, and there I built a house according to Norwegian fashion and paid the two carpenters a dollar a day each until the house was completed. Here I was taken ill, and the first time I lay in bed full twenty-six weeks, and all expected me to die, but the Lord willed that I " try the earth " yet a while longer. I was finally able to be on my feet again but the next summer I was taken ill again and then I was in bed fourteen weeks. After that, both my children were taken ill, so that I never expected that they would live. My wife lay sick fourteen weeks the first time and six weeks the following year; I had to pay for doctor and medicine both for myself and for my family, so that the little money I had left was spent. The disease was not contagious but was occasioned by the abrupt change from warm to cold; the hot summer days caused the sweat to flow even when we sat still, so that our clothes were quite soaked, and when night came there fell a fog or dew which brought a much colder temperature, and this dew lay until the sun rose.

Now this disease smote all without exception, but not all equally hard; some died at once, others lay many months before death took them, still others recovered after a prolonged illness. But I can safely say that in 1838 and 1839 the disease had spread to every home to such an extent that at many

4 Shelbyville, in Shelby County, Missouri. A colony was established there in 1837 by Cleng Peerson, but it proved to be a failure and most of the Norwegians had left by 1840. A rather mournful description of this colony is found in Peter Testman, *Kort Beskrivelse over de vigtigste Erfaringer under et Ophold i Nord-America og paa flere dermed forbundne Reiser* (Stavanger, 1839), translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen as *Peter Testman's Account of his Experiences in North America* (Norwegian-American Historical Association, *Publications, Travel and Description Series*, volume 2 — Northfield, Minnesota, 1927).

places there wasn't even anyone to give the sick a drink of water. At many places the cows were not milked, so that their milk failed altogether—and so it was in many other respects. We hear a great deal of talk about high wages; it is true that the wages are high, but every farmer who leaves Norway ought to consider the fact that in America he must start from the very bottom in every respect, both as to house and all his farm implements, and how can it be possible for one man to get around to all this! Nearly all the building material consists of oak, and I suppose everyone is acquainted with the difficulty of working with oak. It is quite impossible for one man to get along without hiring laborers, much more so than in Norway, where a man is in possession of a well-arranged farm, where he has everything in tolerably good shape; but when you come to the wilderness in America you must take everything from the very beginning; and if you are to pay out a dollar a day for any length of time you will certainly need to have a good sum of money if it is to suffice for everything until the soil can reward the tiller's sweat.

I will now truthfully and conscientiously give an account of as much as I am able to do. As far as religion is concerned, I really must praise the American states, both as regards the Americans themselves and the immigrants from Europe. It is possible to attend school if one calmly remains in the older settlements, but everyone will understand that in the wilderness there are neither schools nor churches. But here and there are houses in which—though very seldom—missionaries conduct services. There are no communion services nor baptisms, except such as are administered by the immigrants themselves, amounting to the same thing as what we call home-baptism.[5]

There are persons in authority just as well as in Norway but with this distinction that there is an election of officers every fourth year, and when they have served four years and society recognizes them as honest and capable in the discharge of their duties they may be reëlected for another four years. Taxes vary, because each state has its own laws, but

[5] *Hjemmedaab.*

there is one tax which everyone must pay as soon as he has a house and a farm; namely, the tax on personal property. The assessor goes around to each house and assesses everything about the place, such as horses, wagons, cows, oxen, sheep, and hogs, — everything a man has, great and small, — and he pays one per cent in tax; this is called property tax and is the same as our *formueskat* in Norway. A man who has purchased a piece of land need not pay any taxes on it until he has occupied it for five years, but after that he must pay a land-tax, and this tax had become quite considerable in Illinois; according to our way of figuring a man would have to pay seventeen and a half *daler*[6] a year for a full-fledged farm, and this was collected from everyone, and if one couldn't pay, the tax was collected by execution or mortgage, just as in Norway.

I will also tell you a little about the expenses one must meet on the voyage from Norway and until he gets far enough inland to buy land. The passage from Norway to New York has generally cost thirty *daler*, but in New York one has daily expenses; one must buy food, and there are so many changes in the manner of travel, from steamers to railroads, then to canal-boats, and finally with horses and wagons on the country road, which cost three or four times as much as here, so that, no matter how simply one travels, no one, in my opinion, can get to the frontier for less than seventy or eighty *daler*. It must be noted that no one who wants to try his luck in America should go to Illinois because all the land there has already been purchased a long time ago, and if you buy a piece of land from someone else, you pay ten times the government price, which in our money is a *daler* and a mark[7] per acre. One had best go either to Wisconsin or Missouri territory. In these regions there is still land to get, but the best is already taken. In this connection let me add that altogether too many are cheated when they come into the wilderness and settle on a piece of land, as everyone is entitled to do if he can pay the set price when the auction is held; but, if he is so unfortunate at that time as not to have enough money to pay

6 A *daler* is equivalent to $1.07 in American money.

7 A mark is equivalent to eight and five-eighths cents in American money. The government price, as is known, was $1.25 an acre.

for it in cash the same day, then any man who has money may buy the land, but the one who has settled and built it up, of course, has the preëmption; if he who has bought the land cares to compensate the occupant for improvements on the property, you can thank his generosity for that; if not, no one can make any legal claims on him. Everyone ought to bear this in mind who intends to settle on such a piece of land; many of the Norwegians have worked several years, built houses, plowed the fields, built fences, and one thing or another, and when the auction was held have been obliged to leave all without the least compensation. In Illinois, where I lived for four years, there was, to be sure, a tolerably good crop of wheat and corn, but a quite mediocre crop of potatoes and oats. The oats were used only for the cattle, and the potatoes never tasted good because the soil is too fine and there is no sand in it anywhere thereabouts. If anyone, now and then, had anything left over of his crop, the cost of transporting it to Chicago was so great that it didn't pay; when a man secured lodging for the night in the home of an American, it cost him a dollar, and I know for a fact that I had to pay half a dollar just to lie on the floor, using my own bed-clothes. But when the canal is finished from our nearest city, Ottawa, to Chicago, it will be more convenient to ship things; and yet there were very few who had anything left of their crops where I was. To be sure there were some of the first immigrants, who settled in Illinois sixteen or eighteen years ago, who had improved their farms sufficiently to leave a surplus of their crops, but there were also, alas! many of the later immigrants who had given up their farms here in Norway and were then reduced to such straits that they had to receive assistance from the poorhouse every week. Quite good arrangements have been made for the needy, and this is paid for by the landing-fee which every person must pay upon landing at New York, four dollars for an adult and two dollars for a child. This is put into a fund, and, when anyone is afflicted with sickness or poverty, he receives help from this fund. But this is not the case with people out in the wilderness, where there are neither towns nor anything, and there are certainly many needy people there who can receive no help.

But that which I thought the most alarming for anyone who comes to America with wife and children is that so many of the parents die and leave their poor orphans to wander about among strangers; I have myself helped move them from one place to another, and sometimes their condition has become better, sometimes worse. Of all these I will only mention one family from Tind, namely, that of Østen Bakke, who passed away a short time after he had arrived at Beaver Creek, Illinois, together with Rynning and many others in the party during the short period of three months.[8] This Østen Bakke left seven children, of whom the oldest daugher was blind when they left Norway, and she wandered about together with the other six in a helpless plight; there are so many such examples that we can't even mention them.

Craftsmen who had learned their profession in a city in Norway could get employment, to be sure, but practically every handicraft had to be learned over again, although it did not take more than five or six weeks' work to learn the method used in this country in every respect. But those who had not learned any handicraft were obliged to seek work on the canals, and there was also some work to be obtained at various places on the railroad. There they would work by the week or by the month and had tolerably good pay, as we figure in Norway, from three to four marks a day, and those who were capable workers and spoke the language got a dollar a day, but those who did heavy labor daily could not last long, as the Americans drive their laborers much harder than we do and because of the heavy sweat occasioned every day by the fierce summer heat and the immoderate drinking of cold water.

When they had struggled along this way for a time, practically all without exception were taken ill, and those who had no shelter were obliged to go to others for care and attention, and this became very expensive, as they had to pay, as a rule, two or two and a half dollars a week, — and the sickness

8 The tragic Beaver Creek colony was founded by Ole Rynning's party in 1837. See Ole Rynning, *Sandfærdig Beretning om Amerika* (Christiania, 1838), translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen as *Ole Rynning's True Account of America* (Norwegian-American Historical Association, *Publications, Travel and Description Series,* volume 1 — Minneapolis, 1926).

might last from twenty to twenty-six weeks, — yes, many were forced to keep their bed a whole year. Those who died were buried in the open field because, of course, there was no consecrated cemetery, nor were there any churches, either, until we came to Chicago, sixty miles from our home.

Cattle-raising on the average farm of a hundred and sixty acres varied considerably. In the state of New York all the land is covered with woods, which must be cleared away, the land plowed and sown with timothy-seed; at such places one could not feed more than six or eight cows, one or two pairs of oxen, one or two horses, and a few sheep, but the raising of sheep was not profitable as the summer heat is too severe for them. In Illinois, on the other hand, the land is of a quite different nature, consisting of so-called prairies, or huge plains covered with grass. These plains have been purchased by speculators, who, on account of the lack of trees, cannot sell them immediately, and therefore one is free to cut as much hay and pasture as many cattle on them as he pleases. The raising of hogs was, however, the most profitable because most of the woods consisted of oak of various kinds, all of which bore a kind of nut which dropped to the ground in the fall, and big herds of swine fed on the nuts until they became nice and fat; pork never tasted quite as good, however, as here in Norway.

A farm equipped with buildings and in good condition commands a price of sixteen to eighteen hundred dollars for a hundred and sixty acres. But, of course, account must be taken of the nature of the soil, the value of the timber, and the distance to the main roads. There is a great variety of conditions among those who have settled in America. Those who have been there sixteen or eighteen years have put their farms into pretty good shape and they can, in part, make a living from their farms without being obliged to work for others; but lately, when money has become so scarce, many settlers, even of those who came earliest, have worked for others in order to earn money for clothes and other necessities, because there is neither spinning nor weaving, but when a man has clipped his sheep he must take the wool to a carding

machine and then to a spinning and weaving machine, where all the work is done on it. There were two mills near the place where I lived, one nine and the other seven miles from my home; we paid with grain, a half bushel or an eighth part of every barrel, both for wheat and for corn.

Barley and rye do not thrive because the strong summer heat forces their growth so much that they turn white before they are half ripe. After I returned to Norway I heard a rumor to the effect that women can make good money in America by baking *flatbrød*,[9] but this is altogether false, as I don't know of any place in America where *flatbrød* is used. In all the houses they use metal ovens, which they buy in the towns; in such ovens they could bake bread just as well as in the best baker's oven in Norway. I brought such an oven back with me to Norway and I can easily bake rye bread in it of the 24-mark size.[10] Two or three blacksmiths emigrated but they had to learn their trade anew in many respects before they got any work. A few carpenters also came, but they didn't get very far and had to work for others for a time. But there were two, whom I knew well, who started making window-casings and this work brought them good profits.

It seldom happens that the Norwegians can settle in the vicinity of any of their countrymen. One year a party of Norwegians come and settle, then a party from Germany, from Ireland, from England, and so on, and they go beyond the others into the wilderness, and so they cannot settle in one district right near each other.

At the places I visited I heard varying opinions regarding emigration and I can truthfully say that most of the people regretted very much their decision to emigrate, especially those who had sold their excellent farms here in Norway and had to do hard manual labor for others and scarcely earn enough to provide themselves with the bare necessities of life. It often happened that the American people merely looked to their own interests, and in many affairs the Americans showed themselves utterly undependable; they were

9 A thin, brittle cake made of barley or rye and water.
10 This is not quite clear. It may possibly mean 2 — 4 mark size.

ready enough to promise but it was a rarity when they kept their promises. But if any of the Norwegians was mistreated, one way or another, or had a lawsuit to bring before the courts, he could obtain his full rights when matters came into the hands of the authorities; for all legal affairs were decided upon according to the evidence.

I will surely advise anyone against making this journey, because one encounters so many difficulties he never expected on account of the many changes in the manner of travel and the many embarrassments caused by the language, which are very considerable, in spite of the fact that there now are some Norwegians in almost every city. The worst of all is sickness, to which all are subject, and which has laid so many a man in the grave. Finally, I must add that when a man leaves his farm in Norway and comes to America with the thought of getting a better farm, — which he seldom succeeds in doing, — even if he buys a piece of uncultivated land, he is obliged to hire laborers at a dollar a day and also provide himself with all kinds of farm implements and, finally, also food for himself and his family for two or three years, until the soil can produce enough to support its tillers.

Just among my acquaintances from Graven's Parish, some of whom came to America with me, others later, the following died a short time after they arrived: Peder Moursæt, Gunder Tvete with wife and son, Niels Wambein, Siovat Wasenden with wife and four of his children, Lars Spilde with wife and two children, Olge Svelge with wife (two children are still living), Aslak Holven, Niels Bilde, Tosten Dahlen, and Holger Nøstvig.

[The author returned to Norway in 1841, this voyage costing him the rest of his money, which, at the time he left Norway, amounted to about four hundred *speciedaler*. Many of his countrymen would have liked to return with him but lacked the means and had, under present conditions, very little hope of ever achieving their desire in this respect.]

A DOCTRINAIRE IDEALIST: HANS BARLIEN

By D. G. Ristad

Overhalla is a parish in the district of Namdalen along the Namsen River and is one of the northernmost in the diocese of Trondhjem, Norway. On the Barlien farm homestead in this parish on February 29, 1772, was born Hans Barlien, the son of an old family of prosperous and independent freeholders. The boy was precocious, courageous, strong, and independent. At the age of twenty-one he broke with family tradition by marrying his servant, Kjerstine Skistad, four years his senior. Intelligent and masterful, he early became a leader. He was largely self-taught; he read whatever books and other printed matter found their way into the secluded valley, but he did his own thinking. An original and creative genius, he was keenly interested in inventions and developed great mechanical skill, even building and experimenting with a gliding plane. The writer's maternal grandfather, who knew him personally, related how Hans Barlien glided through the air from the peak of the barn roof a considerable distance and landed safely. There were, of course, many who considered him erratic and queer; he was so different from the average type of man at that time.

The stirring news of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic era, and the reaction to these movements in the political life of the peoples of Scandinavia, aroused in the soul of Hans Barlien a burning zeal for social, religious, political, and economic reforms, — freedom of thought, equality of opportunity, popular education, and a general realization in private and public life of the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The theories of the French Revolution and of modern democracy had entered his blood. And he was not a silent brooding philosopher, satisfied to deal with new thoughts in the abstract; on the contrary, he was a man of action, and his courage, flaming enthusiasm, and faith in the possibility of the realization of the new ideas won to him a large following,

especially among the laborers, poor tenants, and tax-ridden countryfolk. The ridicule, invective, and intimidation heaped on him by the office-holding class, the clergy and administrative aristocracy, as they saw his radical and intemperate attacks on the existing order and the privileged classes, simply increased his popularity among the less privileged.

During the early years of the century, Denmark having supported Napoleon, the English fleet blockaded the coast of Norway and stopped importation of grain and other foodstuffs; and this, together with failures of crops at home, left the people on the verge of famine. The laborers, tenants, and small freeholders, who were the greatest sufferers, found in Hans Barlien a warm and outspoken sympathizer, and, of course, readily adopted his animosity towards the upper classes of society and laid on them the blame for all ills. Hans Barlien was continually pondering methods and means that might be inaugurated to relieve the needy and establish an economic order of society in which all classes would share alike both in prosperity and adversity. To assist the laborers he thought of establishing industries. Confident that his judgment was correct, he sold his farm and moved to Trondhjem, and launched there upon the manufacture of pottery. This was in 1803. That his efforts must have met with considerable success is evident from the fact that in 1809 the Danish government conferred upon him the knighthood of the Order of Danebrog.

What combination of causes led him to give up his enterprise in Trondhjem is not quite clear. It could not have been on account of financial difficulties, for we find that in 1812 he had bought a large farm, Aargaard, lying between Steinkjer and Namsos. On this farm he attempted to put into operation his new ideas of independence and equality. To his many tenants, he seems to have offered new opportunities of independence by making them freeholders, an experiment at least fifty years ahead of the times.

In order to reach the public with his revolutionary theories, he opened a printing shop on his farm and published there a paper with the poetic title *The Milky Way*. Though a diligent search has been made, not even a fragment of this interesting

publication has been found.[1] This publication did, however, place Hans Barlien so prominently before the people of his district that in 1815, the year after the adoption of the new constitution of an independent Norway, he became a candidate for representative to the first regular national legislature *(Storthing)*, and was elected. After serving through the first session he was, in 1821, chosen as second alternate, and in 1830 first alternate from his district. He should have sat also in the extraordinary legislature of 1822, but was refused power of attorney, because of an action raised against him by the governor of the province of North Trondhjem for a libelous verbal attack on a certain attorney within the district.[2]

His challenging attitude toward the officialdom of his age and his biting criticism of their principles and conduct naturally met with active hostility and opposition. His aggressive radicalism and intemperate language caused him a great many lawsuits and other annoyances, which finally assumed the character of fanatical persecution and affected his financial welfare through all kinds of hindrances placed in his way by his adversaries. At last the battle became too unequal; even his friends grew timid, lost their organization, and assumed the role of interested but inactive bystanders. Disillusioned and embittered, he turned his back upon Norway, leaving his wife and children, never to meet them again, and sailed for America, the only land holding out the hand of friendship to one of his kind.

One of his younger contemporaries, also from Overhalla, Svein Nilsson, himself an idealist and a believer in the new democracy (somewhat later an immigrant in America), says of Hans Barlien:[3]

As one of the carriers of the ideas of the age of the French Revolution he had many friends, who were commonly called "Barlians." Equipped with great natural gifts that proved themselves productive in literary as well as in industrial

1 For this information the writer is indebted to O. A. Aavatsmark of Namsos, Norway, editor and historian, who has written, in a manuscript not yet published, a careful study of Hans Barlien's career in the Norwegian period.

2 Carl G. O. Hansen, "Det Norske Amerika gjennem Hundrede Aar," in *Minneapolis Tidende*, May 28, 1925, Historisk Afdeling A, p. 14.

3 "De skandinaviske Setlementer i Amerika," in *Billed-Magazin* (Madison, Wisconsin), 1:34 (January 2, 1869).

and mechanical fields, he was the object of popular admiration, while many, especially the clergy and the public officials, opposed him on account of the liberal religious and political theories that he fought for. . . . The frivolous manner in which on many occasions he expressed his views, both orally and in writing, entangled him in many lawsuits, out of which he as a rule escaped unconvicted in consequence of his matchless shrewdness and mental acuteness. Weary of the everlasting conflicts with his opponents the then aged man decided to emigrate to America, whence he kept up a lively correspondence with his political allies and friends in Norway. It seems as if the American institutions suited his taste. . . . His letters breathe bitter hatred for Norway. They were copied, circulated and widely read. But by this time only a few had full confidence in the reports of the old agitator, and the 'America-fever' did not spread in earnest among the masses, until Ole Rynning's book became known in the northern sections of the diocese of Trondhjem.

In the year 1837 Hans Barlien emigrated from Norway to the United States.[4] He is supposed to have visited the Fox River settlement in Illinois. He did not remain there very long, but moved on to Missouri. In a letter dated at "St. Fransville," Missouri, on April 23, 1839, and addressed to the Reverend Mr. Rynning, Ole Rynning's father at Snaasen, he says that he has been in St. Louis sixteen months.[5]

Shortly after this we find him at Sugar Creek, near Keokuk, Iowa. He is, as far as we know, the first Norwegian to settle in this state. The purpose of his wanderings in America is not difficult to understand; his letters to friends in Norway (nearly all of them lost) revealed that his ambition was to

[4] Barlien is believed to have been a passenger on the ship "Enigheden," which arrived in New York from Stavanger about the middle of September, 1837. The manifest for this trip in the New York Customs House is dated September 14, 1837. Since the name of Barlien does not appear on it, however, it is possible that he was not a member of this party. See Henry J. Cadbury, "Four Immigrant Shiploads of 1836 and 1837," in Norwegian-American Historical Association, STUDIES AND RECORDS, 2 : 46. According to the same source there were only ninety-one passengers on board "Enigheden" when it arrived. Dr. Flom and Dr. Norlie, who assign Barlien to this party of immigrants, give the number as ninety-three. George T. Flom, *A History of Norwegian Immigration to the United States*, 108 (Iowa City, 1909); Olaf M. Norlie, *History of the Norwegian People in America*, 138 (Minneapolis, 1925).

[5] This letter was published by Rynning in *Morgenbladet* (Christiania), 1839, no. 283. A typewritten copy is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

start a colony in America for Norwegians who were dissatisfied with conditions in the home country, and who, like himself, wanted elbow-room for the new ideas of political, spiritual, and economic freedom and opportunity. In 1840 Kleng Peerson and his followers of landseekers visited Sugar Creek. A number of Norwegians did actually find their way to this infant colony and settle there. Here Hans Barlien died on October 31, 1842. With his death the young colony lost its leader, and when the Mormon sect shortly after broke into the settlement, a considerable number of the settlers were won over to the new religion, and together with other fellow-believers joined the westward movement in 1846, finally settling in Utah.

In one of his last letters to friends in Norway Hans Barlien gives the following expression to his enthusiasm for America and conditions here:

At last I can breathe freely. No one is here persecuted on account of his religious belief; anyone is permitted to worship God in his own way, as his conscience dictates. Pickpockets, lawyers, unscrupulous creditors, a corrupt government, and vagabonds have lost all power to harm the people. Any occupation is free, and everyone reaps the fruits of his own industry. By wise legislation the American citizens are safe against oppression. The so-called free constitution of Norway has so far only served to oppress the people with a continually increasing tax burden for the benefit of the governing class, and to foster luxury and laziness; such conditions must of necessity lead to general ruin.

While sojourning in St. Louis he wrote to his friend Andreas T. Svarliaunet in Overhalla a letter which is translated below.[6] The letter is rather rambling and lacking in logical sequence, but it is interesting for the light it sheds on the causes of Norwegian emigration to America at that time, as well as for its expression of the naïve and complete faith in the excellence of American institutions, living in the hearts of the Norwegian immigrants. This love and trust were rather typical, making emigration for them an adventure into the

[6] The document translated is a copy of the original made by the late Andreas Skogmo, organist in Overhalla, and is printed in the Norwegian language in *Trønderlaget's Aarbok*, 1926, pp. 25-29.

earthly paradise of their vivid dreams. The tone of the letter reveals the undiscriminating and uncompromising spirit of the man, his fierce hatred of oppression of every sort, on the one hand; and on the other, the beautiful idealism of his view of what human society ought to be, and his unselfish desire to make it a reality in the lives of his fellow countrymen.

St. Louis, Missouri, North America, July 14, 1838.

Dearest Friend: Andreas T. Svarliaunet,
Overhalla.

I am now about thirteen hundred Norwegian miles distant from my Norwegian friends and from my dear Fatherland, the land of my birth, a step that I found to be necessary in spite of my advanced age by reason of the pickpockets and other regular robbers and supermen, who are in the habit of taking their neighbors' property by force, and who cannot endure anyone who understands and dares to declare that such conduct is wrong. As long as I had my manhood's strength, I was able to defend my life, but under the semblance of legal procedure they gradually deprived me of my property, contrary to all law and justice. If I had waited until old age had dulled my senses and memory, the robbers and band of pickpockets would have seen their opportunity of victory, and would have made the common people believe that I have been and am a base fellow. It was, therefore, necessary to withdraw from this evident and imminent danger. However, do not for a minute believe that for this reason I consider myself released from my oath as a voting citizen, to the constitution and the king. If all citizens were Americans, or had the intelligence and temper of these, they would at once choose a leader and place all these robbers in the workhouse until they learned to win their livelihood in the manner prescribed by God: "in the sweat of thy brow." But because, perhaps, the greater number of you are like the unfaithful cattledogs that drive the sheep to the wolves in order to live upon the leavings, it is useless to help you, for, even if the privileged miscreants were exterminated, the dogs would take their places, and matters would be worse instead of better.

In order that I may be of assistance to the upright I will try to secure so much of the fertile land found here as to be able to receive and place thereon a few thousand families, and organize a colony with a government in harmony with nature, and in a manner to preclude the thriving of injustice.

Though this is called a slave state, theft is so rare that, though all kinds of things, whether valuable or not, hang on the fences or are placed within open, fenced places, they are never taken. Even things that have dropped in the road from wagons, such as a horseshoe, a boot, or the like, are not picked up by anyone, but left until the street is cleaned, and then hauled away and dumped, the street cleaners and the driver not seeming even to see them.

Is it that way in Norway? Here (in America) it is a shame to make use of anything not really your own. In Norway the common folk imitate the officials in stealing by craft and by violence, and those are regarded and honored most, who steal most.

Here we have no police or military guards or night watchmen; public opinion as to what constitutes good morals is the only thing that is back of a security that cannot be matched in Scandinavia.

So many strangers arrive in this city that they cannot be housed.[7] Shanties are, therefore, built in great numbers to house both the considerable belongings of the travelers and the people themselves, and they all sleep there as securely as if they were within a fortress. All this is due to the protection of this accepted moral order. In truth, this is stronger than all the bulls, laws, regulations, police forces, penalties, and so forth, of Europe. They have trained even the wild Indians so that anyone without any danger may associate with those of them who have received some degree of enlightenment as to what is real honor or disgrace. In this way they may be employed in war against other Indians, and have won both honor and fortune.

Soldiers are here given food and clothing and $12 a month, and do not lose their freedom, for they may resign, if they so

7 In his letter of April 23, 1839, already cited, Barlien sets the population of St. Louis at 20,000.

choose, when their period of service expires. Those who entered the service when I was in Washington, enlisted for six months at $8 a month, and those among them who consented to reënlist would then receive $2 a day, or $60 a month.

They choose their own officers, but Congress appoints the generals, and also others at will. Intelligence and manliness are honored, but stupidity and cowardice are despised. In short, it is the spirit of Christ Jesus that rules America; for the word *Jesus* connotes love, while the word *Christ*, the concept of wisdom. Let the government of Norway and some of its officials slander the American government as much as they please, their government will never match this.

It cannot be denied that here also is much folly. Many worship Mammon so that they cheat where they are able so to do in order to gain their neighbor's property. But then, one need not ask to find out that immigrants of this sort have come from Germania. I have named them the wild "Turks," and the Americans seem to think the term is suitable. The Americans despise all Europeans, except the Scandinavians, most of all the Irish; but they are hopeful for the Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes. As a general rule I have found that as the corruption in Norway increases because of the manners at court, the manners here make progress in virtue and perfection because of the spirit of the government.

One day at the dinner table some Americans who board at the place where I lodge, asked me about my religion. I gave my confession of faith in this way: "I was born a Lutheran, but for thirty years I have had neither faith, nor religion." At this their faces cleared, and they held this to be good sense, and said they hoped that I soon would learn their language.

In my purpose to organize a colony I have found special encouragement. Those who join it would not need to learn the new language, and they would not easily be offended by the wild "Turks," and there are other advantages of such colonization. Anyone who is able and willing to engage in a useful occupation may live well, and, if he is saving, may become prosperous in a short time. A common hired girl, assisting in the household, receives good food, better than that

served at Christmas time in Norway, and a silver dollar a day in wages. It is, however, the farmer that has the most gainful occupation when he delivers his products at the market. Farming is most lucrative because there are too many towns and too little farming, and above all is it profitable because the farmer raises all that he needs in great abundance, and he never knows of a failure of crops.

Thus I find myself highly satisfied here, and live in the sweet expectation of being able to be of assistance to my right-thinking countrymen by preparing a place of refuge for all who will take advantage of it.

If it is desired that I charter a boat for the voyage, a list of all the passengers should be mailed to me and to Mr. Bing, wholesale merchant at Trondhjem, who will ship them to New Orleans or to any other American seaport, and then by stage to their destination. If anyone has money to take passage at once, book for New Orleans, and from there by steamboat 1200 miles to St. Louis. The fare for this last distance is $8 for each person and his baggage.

The cost of transportation across the ocean varies. Last summer it was at the highest when I had to pay $50, and board myself. But then I had the privilege of a cabin and was served coffee in the morning and tea at night. Those in the steerage, who receive only fuel and water, paid $30 for adults, $10 for minors, and babies were carried free of charge.

The lack of accommodation was caused by a check in the trade, due to the fact that Congress had forbidden the banks, for some time, to make payments in silver. This prohibition was lifted on November 30, and December first was celebrated as a holiday. Cannon were fired all day, and in the evening illuminations and bonfires were lit around in the city, and so on.

I have referred to the rejoicing of the merchants on account of the lifting of the ban on specie payment, a protest against the manifestation of the spirit that has no care for the common welfare, as long as it can enrich itself.

HANS BARLIEN

N. B. Some letters to Norway and Denmark I have mailed

via the West Indies to be forwarded from St. Thomas to Copenhagen.

When this letter is read in Overhalla by anyone who desires to hear from me, let it be sent to Lorents Lyngsnæs at Vigten [8] who will know how to deal with it discreetly.

HANS BARLIEN

8 Vigten is an island in the Namsenfjord.

NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN EMIGRATION SOCIETIES IN THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES

By Albert O. Barton

Interesting in view of the later rise of the *Bygdelags*[1] in the Northwest was the formation in Chicago in the forties and fifties of organizations by the emigrants from the district of Voss in Norway.[2] Although the objects of the earlier Chicago group were not primarily the same as those of the present *Bygdelags*, the organizations had one result in common, the bringing about of a closer social contact among their members. The original Chicago organization designated itself a correspondence society, the purpose of which was to exchange letters with relatives and friends in Voss and to correct what its members considered erroneous statements and remove false impressions concerning America and the status of the transplanted Norwegian emigrants. Out of this organization, it might be said, grew a later one known as the Voss Emigration Society, the chief object of which was to aid prospective Voss emigrants to come to America.

As early as 1836 Norwegian emigrants had settled in Chicago. This was but eleven years after the arrival of the sloop "Restaurationen," from the coming of which Norwegian emigration to America is generally dated.

Rasmus B. Anderson cites Chicago as the third center of Norwegian settlement in America, with that at Kendall, New York, in 1825, as first, and that at Fox River, Illinois, in 1834, as second. Halstein Torrison of Fjeldsberg and Johan Larson of Kobbervig, who settled in Chicago in 1836, are given by him as the first Norwegian settlers there.[3] However, a sailor, David Johnson, is credited with having come there in 1834.[4]

1 *Bygdelags*, or district leagues, are organizations for social and cultural purposes among emigrants or their descendants from the various *Bygds* or districts of Norway.

2 Voss is a long and narrow inland district in south central Norway, near and slightly northeast of Bergen.

3 Rasmus B. Anderson, *First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration*, 194 (Madison, 1896).

4 Hjalmar R. Holand, *De norske Settlementers Historie*, 100 (Ephraim, Wisconsin, 1908).

Also it is claimed that Nils Knutson Røte and his wife, said to have been the first emigrants from Voss, settled in Chicago in 1836.[5] Their coming was significant, for within a year or two there was a considerable colony of Vossings in Chicago, which soon exercised no little influence in all Norwegian circles there. As Chicago was the gateway to the Northwest, all streams of the earlier immigration flowed through it to the various settlements and thus came in contact with the Chicago group. Among these Vossings were a number of good and industrious letter-writers, who sent many well-written letters to relatives in the old homeland, letters which not only stimulated emigration but sought to correct many erroneous impressions then current in Norway concerning America and American conditions. It was this early activity on their part that led to the so-called correspondence society of 1848. Even earlier, however, this group was to play a significant part in the emigration movement.

Taking alarm at the proportions which emigration was assuming in the later thirties, the authorities in Norway made energetic efforts to discourage it and succeeded so far as almost to bring about its practical suspension by 1840. Everywhere there was agitation against it. In 1837 Bishop Jacob Neumann of Bergen issued a pastoral letter to the peasants of the diocese of Bergen painting in dark colors the hazards of emigration.[6] Ministers preached from the pulpit against it and public officials imposed difficulties and sometimes coercive measures upon prospective emigrants. More influential perhaps than these agencies, however, were the so-called "America letters" and other writings, sent home by dissatisfied emigrants in America, such as the pamphlet by Peter Testman, published in Stavanger in 1839, and a letter by Sjur Jørgenson Lokrheim from the Fox River settlement.[7] Such

[5] *Vossingen*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 1-12 (December, 1924). This magazine, which is the organ of *Vosselaget*, is published at Madison, Wisconsin.

[6] *Bishop Jacob Neumann's Word of Admonition to the Peasants*, translated and edited by Gunnar J. Malmin, in Norwegian-American Historical Association, STUDIES AND RECORDS, 1: 95-109 (Minneapolis, 1926).

[7] Peter Testman, *Kort Beskrivelse over de vigtigste Erfaringer under et Ophold i Nord-America og paa flere dermed forbundne Reiser*, translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen, as volume 2 of the Norwegian-American Historical Association's *Travel and Description Series* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1927).

writings were not infrequently printed in the Norwegian newspapers or brought out in pamphlet form.

It was then that the Chicago Vossings, roused to action, made their first notable move to counteract these letters. News of the Lokrheim letter had come to Chicago through correspondents in Voss, and in the fall of 1840 Anders Flage sent home a stirring letter to Voss in the name of all the Vossings of Chicago, branding as false many of the statements in the letters of discontent and setting forth the true condition of affairs among the immigrants, together with much general information of value.[8] Knut A. Rene, a later historian, says of this letter:[9]

Knowledge of these letters soon came to the Vossings in America. Lars Nesheim[10] and Steffa Sonve had sent word to them and it was these letters which led Anders Flage to write his remarkable letter to Voss in the fall of 1840 as a message from all the Vossings in Chicago and signed by four of them. Flage denounces many things in the letters as pure falsehoods and deplores their tone. Instead of fourteen or fifteen of the Voss immigrants of 1839 having died, as reported, there were but six, whom he names, three being children and three adults. He describes the prevailing maladies and tells of his own experiences, which had been severe enough, but says his condition is now improved. The price of land is given. It may be noted what he says of the land, that "while, probably the best land in Illinois has been taken, those desiring land are now going to a state called Wisconsin, which lies northwest of Illinois. It is said the land is better there than in Illinois and cheaper in price." It is also stated in the letter that Nils Gilderhus of Koshkonong has just been in Chicago and also Elling Sundve[11] has returned from his Wisconsin tour.

Testman is said to have died and been buried at Winneconne, Wisconsin. See *Sønner av Norge*, March, 1928. Lokrheim was probably identical with Haaeim, whose "Information on Conditions in North America" is published in this volume of STUDIES AND RECORDS.

8 *Vossingen*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 4-11 (1922).

9 *Vossingen*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 6 (December, 1924).

10 Lars Nelsen Nesheim, born in 1792, was a bachelor farmer in Voss, given to literary pursuits, the collection of folklore and ballads, the dissemination of America-letters, and so forth. He acted as correspondent from Voss for the Chicago Vossing group and ardently upheld the side of emigration and the emigrants, although he never came to America himself. He died at a great age at Lemme, in Voss. See I. D. Hustvedt, "Nogle Erindringer om Lars Nelsen Nesheim," in *Vossingen*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 10-16 (April, 1924).

11 Elling Eielsen Sundve was a noted pioneer lay preacher and Haugian, who came to America in 1839.

Flage tells of the labor situation and wages and what should and should not be taken on the trip to America. Then follows an account of nearly all the emigrated Vossings and of many other things. His letter is an historical document of the greatest value.

The Flage letter and others had a wholesome effect upon the people, and in the forties emigration to America was resumed on a large scale from many parts of Norway. Then came the Løvenskjold report, which led to the next notable step by the Vossings of Chicago, now a large, compact, and prosperous colony. In 1847 Adam Løvenskjold, diplomatic representative at Washington of the Swedish-Norwegian government, was directed to make a survey of the Norwegian settlements and write a report on them. He went to Milwaukee, visited various settlements, and on his return to New York prepared his report to the government, which was later published.[12] It does not appear that he visited Chicago. This report was generally regarded as an argument against emigration and was criticised by many leading Norwegians in this country as unfair and unreliable.

The Vossing group in Chicago decided not to let this document go unchallenged, and in 1848 they organized a correspondence society with the special objects in view of giving systematic enlightenment to the Norwegian people concerning the status of their emigrated countrymen and of refuting false assertions and correcting wrong impressions regarding America and the Norwegian immigrants. It was decided to send a letter to Voss each month and, if possible, to secure replies to such letters.

After some preliminary meetings an organization was formed, a constitution adopted, and officers elected whose chief duty was to carry out the correspondence program. Active in the organization were such men as Anders Nilsen Braekke, Ivar Larson Boe,[13] and Endre Nielsen Testdal.

[12] Report by Consul General Adam Løvenskjold to the Norwegian government, October 15, 1847, on Norwegian settlements in the United States, translated by Knut Gjerset as "An Account of the Norwegian Settlers in North America," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 8: 77-88 (September, 1924).

[13] Ivar Larson Boe, one of the leading Vossings of Chicago, came to America in 1844. He became wealthy in real estate and early adopted the name of Lawson. He was a member of the city council of Chicago and of the Illinois

Anders Nilsen Braekke was elected *ordfører* (literally spokesman, or president), and Testdal secretary. The original secretary's book, which fortunately has been preserved, contains the constitution and copies of the letters sent to Norway.[14] The constitution is incorporated in the first letter, which follows, in part:

To our dear Fatherland and old Norwegian Friends:

Since many erroneous impressions exist in our fatherland concerning the political as well as the religious situation in America, particularly as relating to the emigrated Norwegians, and in order that these may be dispelled through correct advices from the immigrants here, which can be brought about only through a systematic correspondence, we have agreed and decided as follows:

I

That to attain the end sought we form ourselves into a Correspondence Society of Chicago, Ill., for the mutual purpose of meeting the costs which will ensue upon writing to Norway, and, possibly, of obtaining correspondence therefrom.

II

The officers of the society shall be a president, a vice president, a secretary, and an assistant secretary, who together shall constitute an executive committee. It shall be the duty of the president to preside at meetings of the society and in his absence the vice president shall do so. The secretary and the assistant secretary shall keep a careful record of the meetings of the society, its correspondence and business, and publish such matter as the society may determine. It shall be the duty of the executive committee to appoint each month a qualified man to write to Norway upon such matters as the society may order. No such writings shall be sent without the approval of the committee, the members of which shall subscribe to them in the name of the society.

legislature. He was also one of the founders of the Republican Party. His son, Victor Lawson, became the publisher of the *Chicago Daily News*. In 1866, with John Andersen, Ivar Lawson founded *Skandinaven*, with his wife's uncle Knud Langeland as editor. He lost about $50,000 in the Chicago fire of 1871 and died the following year. It was on his motion as alderman that Lincoln Park was so named in 1866.

14 The hand-written secretary's book containing part of the minutes of the Vossing Correspondence Society and copies of the letters written in 1848 and 1849 is now in the possession of Knut A. Rene of Madison, Wisconsin, historian of the Vossing society (*Vosselaget*), who obtained this precious document from Edward Williams of Chicago. Mr. Williams is a son of Knut Erickson Rjodo (Williams), who served as a lieutenant in the Civil War. See *Vossingen*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 27 (1922).

III

The society shall hold a meeting each month and oftener if necessary for the transaction of its business. It shall also be the duty of the executive committee to report at such meetings on any correspondence received from Norway, and so forth.

IV

Anyone having anything that might contribute to the objects of the society should give it to the executive committee, and if it appears to be of value it shall be forwarded, but if not so considered it shall not be sent in the name of the society. All proceedings must have the approval of the society.

In accordance with the above articles we would request that the organist and the deacon David Larson Lemme and Lars Nielsen Nesheim be so kind as to receive our letters and make them known to our relatives and others who might wish a correct understanding and also to make provision for correspondence to be sent us each month setting forth the political, ecclesiastical, industrial and trade situations, together with such other information as might be of interest to us.

In the event that David Larson Lemme and Lars Nielsen Nesheim are so situated that they cannot undertake to make public our correspondence they will do us a great service if they will secure some other qualified man to undertake this, as we believe there are many who would find satisfaction in doing so, particularly since we will pay the postage on letters both sent and received.

Several paragraphs follow, in one of which it is stated that there are about one hundred Norwegian families in Chicago, their total numbers about six hundred and fifty. Then follow these paragraphs:

In our next letter we shall seek to give an account of the report made by Consul General Adam Løvenskjold to the department, dated October 15, 1847, of his visit during the past summer to the Norwegian settlements in the western provinces of the North American states, to point out the many and great faults it reveals on the part of the author, possibly because of his lack of knowledge of the true condition of the Norwegians, or possibly because he has permitted himself to be led to give such untrue and distorted impressions.

. . .

A change in the postal regulations has been made by which a European can now prepay postage on all letters he may wish to send to his old home, which is a change greatly

appreciated by us, as we hope now to be able to correspond with our old and dear Norwegian friends.

The letter is dated Chicago, September 30, 1848, and is signed by Anders Nilsen Braekke, Ivar Larson Boe, Endre Nilsen Testdal and Ole Thormodsen Gjerdager.

Eight letters, or "articles," of considerable length were sent to Norway, although it does not appear in the records of the society that any letters were received from Norway in return.

The second letter, dated Chicago, November 1, 1848, is an extended and caustic criticism of the report of Consul General Adam Løvenskjold on his visit to the Norwegian settlements in the West in 1847. In part, it says at the opening:

Neither time nor space will permit us to enter upon a full discussion as to the merits of Mr. Løvenskjold's observations concerning the Norwegians. Yet we cannot forego remarking that these errors show plainly enough how very difficult it is for one, either here or in Norway, to put himself in the common man's place and give an accurate and reliable report on such a short visit as Mr. Løvenskjold made last year to the Norwegian settlements. For all that, we would cherish the hope that Mr. Løvenskjold would not wish to portray America in false colors. Nevertheless, we ask our friends in particular, and the Norwegian public in general, to remember that Mr. Løvenskjold is the Norwegian government's servant, and, as such, in order to win favor and distinctions he must carry out its purposes.

And that is nothing strange. Every friend of the common people in Norway has for a long time been distressed to witness how the Norwegian government has sought, both directly and indirectly, to frighten the working class away from America and thus hinder emigration, well knowing that by taking such a haughty stand the few could retain their servitors and thus insure to themselves unbounded ease and power. However, we hope the time is not far distant when everyone, be he high or low, will take the truth as neighbor. Mr. Løvenskjold is plainly misinformed as to the Norwegians in America, which may be partly because his informants were themselves ignorant and partly because he visited only a few of the Norwegian settlements.

Instead of a population of 12,000, as Mr. Løvenskjold claims, it is clear that the Norwegians in the United States number from 25,000 to 30,000, since it is reported, following the census

of last winter, that Wisconsin alone has 15,000 Norwegians. And as to Illinois, we shall simply mention Chicago, which Mr. Løvenskjold did not include in his count. After careful investigation we find that the Norwegians here in Chicago have a population of from 600 to 700 and enjoy a general prosperity. Yes, we have the greatest cause to be thankful, since many among us who, on their arrival, did not own their own clothes are now in comparatively independent circumstances — yes, even have several hundreds of dollars out at interest. And this has not been brought about by any chance stroke of fortune, but as a result of industry and economy.

The third letter (or "article," so-called) dated December 1, 1848, is interesting because it is devoted to a discussion of the financial status or rating of many of the leading Vossings of Chicago at the time and thereby shows the modest beginnings of some later fortunes in the rising western metropolis.[15]

A few paragraphs may be quoted:

We will first speak of Anders Nilson Braekke, who on his coming to Chicago had no more than a few dollars — barely enough for two months' support for himself and his wife — and who now has a considerable piece of ground, with a fine house on it and several hundred dollars at interest. He was this year elected street commissioner for a portion of the city known as the "north division." He is a church warden in the Biscopali [*Episcopal*] church.

Ivar Larson Boe has also acquired a considerable amount of real estate in the city and a fine home. Besides, he and his brother are half owners of a sailing vessel which he and another Norwegian bought for eighteen hundred dollars, and he is also employed at the postoffice and has now a wage of twenty-five dollars a month.

Knut Larson Boe is also in possession of real estate in the city, with a very good house on it. For two years he has been a farmer at Koshkonong, in Wisconsin, where he found a good farm which he has now sold for one thousand dollars. Since he returned here he has had from four to six offices to care for, make beds for the office tenants, build fires in stoves, and so forth, for which he has had from two to four dollars a month from each office. Besides he has been employed this summer at a soda water station. A sort of sharp drink is made there which is a good quencher of thirst, and for this he had twelve dollars a month.

[15] The original of this third letter, sent to Norway eighty years ago, recently came into the possession of Knut A. Rene of Madison, Wisconsin.

Bryngel Halderson Løne is employed at the Sherman House and has fifteen dollars a month wages. However, he has decided to quit this employment in a short time to attend an academy and learn book-keeping.

Anders Flage has bought some land which he has improved and upon which he raises many kinds of fruit which he sells in town for a high price. On this he also has his house. He also has some land farther out in the state on which there is no house. We are sure that if he wished to sell his property he could get two thousand dollars. Thus has God blessed his industry and frugality since his coming here.

Ole Boe has also bought a small piece of ground and has also built a large fine house. For his house and lot he has been offered $800. His employment has been varied. This summer he cut hay on the prairies and sold it, receiving $1.25 to $1.50 a ton — two thousand pounds, which he easily cut in a day. Now he is working in a turn shop and receives $12 a month. Sometimes he has sawed and split wood. For sawing and splitting wood a man gets $.75 a cord. A cord is eight feet long and four feet high and the sticks four feet long.

Claus Skjeldalen was this summer with Lars Istad at Quinong, but has now gone to Michigan, one hundred miles from here. His work is to cut timber, for which he receives eighteen dollars a month, board and lodging. . . . Anders Anfinsen Prestgaarden has gone to New Orleans.

On December 1 Anders Braekke sent one of our Norwegian newspapers to Nils Ygre and paid the postage on the same.[16] We wish you would inform us when it arrived and if there was any expense with it. If there is no further cost Anders Braekke and others will send other newspapers if desired. We believe from what we have learned of American laws there will be no further charges after we have paid here.

The fourth letter, dated January 1, 1849, discusses the political equality prevailing in America and also tells briefly of the gold rush to California. On the subject of freedom and equality it says, in part:

Here it is not asked, what or who was your father, but the question is, what are you? . . . Freedom is here an element which is drawn in, as it were, with mother milk, and seems as essential to every citizen of the United States as the air he breathes. It is part of his life, which cannot be compromised

16 The newspaper referred to is presumably *Nordlyset*, founded in the Muskego settlement in 1847 by Even Heg and James D. Reymert.

nor surrendered, and which is cherished and defended as life itself. It is a national attribute, common to all. Herein lies the secret of the equality everywhere seen. It is an American political creed to be one people. This elevates the lowly and brings down the great. . . . It would be far from our purpose to rouse a spirit of discontent, but as American citizens who have tasted the joys of being free of the yoke which tyrants ever bear with them, and having in common with you the Norwegian temper, love of liberty, and warmth of heart, we would say to you who dwell amid Norway's mountains: Show yourselves worthy sons of the north. Stand as a man for your liberties. Let freedom and equality be your demands, truth and the right your reliance, and the God of justice will give you victory.

Letter number five, dated February 1, 1849, discusses the religious situation in America and gives statistics on the various denominations and sects. In a postscript to the letter Anders N. Braekke, one of the three signers, tells of the birth of a daughter and that she has been baptized Marthe Lovisa Andrews, thus indicating that already the Norwegians there had begun to Americanize their names, another instance being that of his coworker Ivar Larson, who changed his name to Lawson.

The letter also tells of the excitement prevailing over the gold rush to California. That Ivar Larson was keeping in touch with the events of the day and was an admirer of General John C. Frémont, the California "pathfinder," is indicated in the fact that later he named his son, born September 9, 1850, Victor Fremont Lawson.[17]

Letter number six continues a discussion of church matters, and the seventh letter deals with the "Scandinavian Lutheran Church of Chicago." It sets forth that at a meeting of Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes held at Bethel chapel, Chicago, on February 14, 1848, the "Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chicago, Illinois," was organized under the forms and rules of the Franckean Evangelical Lutheran Synod of

[17] Victor F. Lawson was educated at Phillips Andover and Harvard. With Melville E. Stone, he became publisher of the *Chicago Daily News* and founder of the Associated Press. In 1880 he married Jessie Bradley of a prominent Chicago family, who died in 1914. Victor F. Lawson died on August 19, 1925, and left, besides his newspaper properties, bequests of over $2,000,000.

New York, with Ole Anderson as chairman and Paul Anderson, later pastor, as secretary.

That much zeal for this organization was kindled is indicated in the following paragraph from the letter:

We believe it would be not without interest to you to know how we are occupied on Sundays. At 9 o'clock in the morning we have Sunday school in the English language, to which all who wish may come. This continues until 10:30, when public church services are held, which concludes the religious exercises of the forenoon. At 2:30 in the afternoon we have preaching again and sometimes at 7 in the evening also, and every other Sunday afternoon we have services in the English language. We also have weekly meetings, such as prayer meetings, which are held every Thursday evening, while every Friday evening we have singing school.

The eighth and concluding letter, which is dated May 1, 1849, makes strong complaint because no replies have been received from Norway to letters sent by the organization. Some of the Chicago Norwegians, it says, believe the people of Norway think the emigrants unworthy of notice, while others think letters may have been sent, but have been lost or are lying unclaimed in postoffices. The communication states that in 1848 between four thousand and five thousand letters were sent to Norway by immigrants in America, while only one hundred to one hundred and fifty were received in reply. The letter continues, in part:

We hope, dear countrymen, that you will not infer from the above that we bewail the day that we left our dear fatherland. No; do not misunderstand us; for we recall with gladness the day that we left the chill cliffs of Norway, and praise the Lord whose wisdom guided us so that our lot has been to dwell in a land where liberty and freedom prevail, for here we can enjoy all the privileges to which men are rightfully entitled.

A little of everything. . . . In this city Mr. Ogden has opened a factory where are made cradling machines [*reapers*] to cradle [*reap*] crops of grain.[18] In this factory 135 men work daily and receive from one dollar to one dollar and a half a

18 William B. Ogden, an early day capitalist and mayor of Chicago, died on August 3, 1877. He adopted Pauline von Schneidau, daughter of "Count" von Schneidau, one of the aristocratic Swedish settlers at Pine Lake, Wisconsin, in the forties. This adopted daughter later married Eugene Jerome, a member of a prominent New York family. Von Schneidau also served for a time as Swedish-Norwegian vice consul in Chicago.

day. The company aims to make eight complete machines a day and the price of each is one hundred and twenty-five dollars. With one of these, fifteen acres of grain can be cradled in a day. They are driven with horses around the fields and the machines cut the wheat and collect it into large bundles which they then throw off. To bind and shock these requires four men and these have no time for looking around if they bind and stack all that a machine cuts.

The eighth letter was apparently the last one written and sent out by the organization. In the original record book of the society an open space is left for "Artikel 9," with the simple notation: "Chicago, October 2, 1849. To Stephen Larson Boe, Knut Ivarson Glimme and Claus Knutson Skjeldal." It may be remarked that these three members of the society were on a visit to Voss in the fall of 1849 and the winter of 1849-50 and that a formal letter to home friends was therefore thought unnecessary. The fact that no replies had been received to previous letters has been given as a partial reason for their visit to the old home. Their visit was so fruitful of results that it is said that about eight hundred emigrants left for America with them the following spring or in the course of the summer of 1850. This probably was also the reason for the correspondence society's ceasing its activities. Its main purpose had been accomplished and a strong tide of Norwegian emigration had set in.[19]

In the spring of 1856 two of the most substantial Vossings of Chicago, Ivar Larson Boe (Lawson) and Anders Nilson Braekke, went on a visit to Voss. They had become well-to-do in Chicago and in them were exemplified the fruits of opportunity in America. Naturally they discovered many of their countrymen who were desirous of coming to America, but lacked the means for so doing. On their return to Chicago in the fall they were instrumental in organizing another society, somewhat similar to the earlier one, the object of which was to provide funds to aid worthy emigrants from Voss.

The records and activities of this later society as herewith set forth are gleaned chiefly from the files of *Wossingen,* a small monthly newspaper started at Leland, Illinois, near the

[19] *Vossingen,* vol. 6, no. 4, p. 10 (December, 1924).

close of the year 1857, which became a sort of organ for the Chicago organization. Fortunately a practically complete file of this paper as published in the United States is in existence and from it a fair idea of the activities of the Chicago society may be obtained.[20]

The society was organized on October 23, 1856, and was named "Det Vossiske Emigrationsselskab," the Vossing Emigration Society. A constitution was adopted on November 13 and on November 17 the following officers were elected: Ivar Larson Boe, president; Anders B. Johnson (Lassehaug), vice president; Anders Larson Flage, treasurer; Endre Nielsen Testdal, secretary. In addition an executive committee was elected consisting of Anders Nilsen Braekke, John Anundson Hoefte and Rognald Haldorson Løne.[21]

The constitution as adopted follows:

Constitution of the Voss Parish Emigration Society

1. The object of this society is to collect funds through free subscriptions to be used simply and only to help needy and worthy families to America, and whoever subscribes to this fund under this constitution shall be regarded as a member of this society.

2. The officers of the society shall be a president, a vice president, a treasurer, and a secretary, who with the other three elected officers shall form the executive committee of the society and who shall hold their positions for one year, or until their successors are elected and qualified.

3. This committee shall appoint a sub-committee of nine of the most reliable men in Voss, though whom the aforesaid collected funds shall be loaned to such persons only as this committee recommends and considers worthy, and in the meantime the society will hold the executive committee responsible to itself. The committee in Norway shall be responsible to the executive committee in its transactions with

20 A practically complete file of *Wossingen* is in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The American numbers of the file had been taken to Norway by its editor, Nils Bakkethun. On his death, this file, with other effects, was sent to his old friend Lars Pederson Rogne in Chicago. On Rogne's death it passed to Nils Anderson Kvale (Raundalen), a brother-in-law, and from him to Knud Henderson of Cambridge, Wisconsin, then historian of the Vossing Society. In 1919 Mr. Henderson presented the file to the author of the present article, who deposited it with the Wisconsin Historical Society. See *Vossingen,* vol. 4 no. 3, p. 25 (1922).

21 Rognald Haldorson Løne came to Chicago in 1844. He was an elder brother of Knud Henderson of Cambridge, Wisconsin.

it. Furthermore, the executive committee shall have full power to prescribe rules under which the sub-committee shall serve, and the conditions which, in its judgment, shall seem necessary for carrying out the purposes of the society.

4. The funds collected shall be loaned, not given, to persons who may wish to emigrate to America, but the aforesaid committee is hereby authorized to make exceptions to this rule at its discretion.

5. The sub-committee in Voss shall, before it advances any of the society's funds, obtain written bonds or notes, executed according to American laws, for the repayment of loans in such time as the executive committee shall determine, and such bonds or notes shall be forwarded to the resident committee, which shall exert all diligence to redeem them.

6. The loans thus repaid to the aforesaid fund shall not be returned to the original contributors, but shall be used again as in the first instance and thus insure a perpetual fund in accordance with the purposes of the society.

7. Annual meetings of the society shall be held for the election of officers and the receiving of reports of each previous year.

8. Officers of the society may be reëlected if it shall seem advisable.

9. This constitution may be amended at any annual meeting by two-thirds of the members present.

Ivar Larson Boe, President
Endre N. Testdal, Secretary

Chicago, December 18, 1856

A lengthy appeal signed by Ivar Larson Boe, president, and Endre Testdal, secretary, was issued as of December 18, 1856, and published in the Norwegian newspaper *Emigranten*. The society aimed to form local branches, or subordinate chapters, and one such was formed in the Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, settlement, which sent $106 to the head lodge in 1858, to add to the emigration fund. The officers voted that a third of the funds collected should be sent to Voss and two-thirds be put out at interest. A considerable number of families in Voss were thus aided in coming to America.

An outgrowth of the activities of the society was the appearance in December, 1857, as previously stated, of a small Norwegian newspaper called *Wossingen,* published at Leland, Illinois, by Nils T. Bakkethun.[22] It was the precursor by a

[22] Nils T. Bakkethun, publisher of *Wossingen,* became a compositor in the office of *Emigranten,* at Madison, Wisconsin, after the Civil War. In 1869 he

half century of the present day *Bygdelag* organs in that it was designed to give information concerning the Vossings in this country and in Norway. It also served as an organ for the Chicago society and as a medium for the exchange of letters between Vossings and their relatives in Norway and America.[23] For these reasons, and because only one file of this publication is known to be in existence, a more extended notice of it may be desirable.

In addition to the constitution of the emigration society and other announcements, the first issue gives the names of the Vossings in and about Leland, tells of deaths among Vossings in Norway and of weddings among them in Chicago, and contains similar news items.

The issue of January, 1858, contains a long humorous letter from a Vossing in Wisconsin and a poem on a free press by Wergeland, in which a suppressed press is compared with a suppressed steam kettle. It also contains information about the new Norwegian movement to Kansas.

Issue number 3 gives a list of the Vossings who came to Chicago in 1857, with some amusing comments on individuals and families, together with reports of deaths and marriages in Voss. The slender subscription list of the paper is published, and a serial entitled "A Courtship in Hardanger" is begun, though it is not continued in succeeding numbers of the paper.

The March, 1858, issue states that about a hundred copies of the paper are being sent to Norway, while an advertisement from *Emigranten,* at Madison, says that C. F. Solberg has become its editor and that it has a circulation of two thousand. One Nils Bakkethun contributes a letter to relatives, saying that conditions are not so favorable at Leland as in Wisconsin; that the land at Leland is flat as the ocean, but swampy, and the air heavier than in Wisconsin. To this the

went to Norway and on June 13, 1871, began republication of *Wossingen,* at Voss, having purchased an old press at Bergen. Twenty-three numbers of the paper were published in 1871 and in 1872 it was issued as a weekly, but in the spring of 1873 Bakkethun sold the paper to O. L. Kindem and returned to Chicago to resume his work as a compositor. See *Vossingen,* vol. 9, no. 2-3, p. 44 (1927).

[23] Albert O. Barton, "The Beginnings of the Norwegian Press in America," in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings,* 1916, p. 186-212.

editor replies, saying Illinois is as good as Wisconsin for a home.

The issue of April, 1858, tells of the arrival in Voss of Ivar Larson Boe, president of the emigration society, who has gone there to aid in the emigration of Vossings. It also tells of the arrival of a ship with five hundred Norwegians bound for Kansas.

Issue number 6 urges its readers to write to relatives through the paper. It states that the postage on twelve copies of the paper would be only eighteen Norwegian skillings, while the postage on a single letter would be from sixty to seventy skillings.

The issue of June, 1858, also contains more than a dozen letters, about an equal number being contributed from each side of the ocean. The letters from the homeland were usually written by the parish minister for the members of his flock to their relatives in this country.[24] A typical letter follows:

To Claus Anundsen Skjeldal and Lars Nielsen Gjernes: We hereby extend our thanks to you for the latest letter and greeting we have received from you. May the Lord strengthen you to bear the loss of a dear sister, sister-in-law, and beloved wife. We have sent you a letter this winter which we hope you have received. Will say that we, with our families, and parents, are well, and hope to see in the paper "Wossingen" that you are also well. With kind greetings.

Ole Knudsen Skjeldalen and
Rognald Rognaldsen Nestaas

Skjeldalen, the 15th April, 1858

The issue of July, 1858, gives the number of Vossings in Chicago as about two hundred. In this number are included by name twenty-one families, three widowers, four widows, eighteen unmarried young men, and twenty-nine unmarried young women.

Up to this point the paper had appeared as a small three-column single sheet, but the issue of October, 1858, appears as a four-column, four-page paper about twice the size of previous issues. This issue makes the interesting announcement

[24] Barton in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1916.

that Nikol L. Nikolson was to open an evening school for newcomers in the Methodist Episcopal Church at Leland for a course of two evenings a week, from six to nine o'clock, for ten weeks. The charge was to be a dollar and a half for the course, plus twenty-five cents for light. The ambitious curriculum as set forth included the following subjects: orthography, grammar, geography, astronomy, natural philosophy, arithmetic, writing, algebra, language, and song notes. The instruction was to be in English as far as possible. On singing school evenings admission was to be free, and young ladies were especially invited to these meetings.[25]

The perils of ocean navigation at the time are also suggested in this issue in a table showing the loss of nine ships since 1853 and of 2,598 passengers and seamen.

The November, 1858, issue contains the announcement that Marcus Thrane, the Norwegian agitator and labor leader, had been released on the preceding July 15 after several years of imprisonment. This was evidently regarded as "big news," and welcome, as it is set forth in large type with appropriate exclamation points.

The issue dated January, 1860, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, contains the interesting announcement that the paper had been suspended for a time and was now to be published at Milwaukee. No further particulars concerning the removal are given. Then comes an announcement in the March, 1860, issue that the paper would be again suspended in order to give the editor a rest and an opportunity to increase his subscription list.

The last number extant in the file is given as "No. 13, 3d year," and the place and date of publication as "Bakkethun, Voss, Saturday 30. Sept. 1871," with the parenthetical statement, "Earlier published two years in America."

Of the further work of the emigration society it may be said that it was continued for some years with no little success.

The Vossing organizations here discussed form an interest-

[25] In October, 1855, the Eielsen Synod opened a school at Lisbon, Illinois, known as the Lisbon Seminary. Bjorn Holland, still living at Hollandale, Wisconsin, was one of three pupils first enrolled. See Olaf M. Norlie, *History of the Norwegian People in America*, 218 (Minneapolis, 1925).

ing study in their influence upon Norwegian immigrant life, in Chicago particularly, and in their associations with the names of many men who later became prominent, such as Victor Lawson, John Anderson, and Knute Nelson.[26]

Survivors of the period who were active in these organizations or have any distinct recollections of them are now very few. One such is Knud Henderson (Løne) of Cambridge, Wisconsin, now in his ninety-third year and still active in mind and body, who in 1927 again revisited his native Voss from which he emigrated seventy-nine years ago. Mr. Henderson is authority for the statement that the emigration society movement was but one phase of the organized social life among the Chicago Vossings. There were also church and social clubs and a debating society. Many of the activities of these groups were planned, he says, in Sunday afternoon meetings in the kitchens of wealthy Americans where bright Norwegian girls were employed as housemaids. Few Norwegians at the time had houses large enough for such gatherings. In a recent interview he says:[27]

At that time (about 1852) there was quite a colony of Vossings in Chicago. They were the leading element in Norwegian church and political circles. At first they met in private houses. Then they built a small church on Superior street, the services being conducted by a Mr. Smith, an unordained lay preacher of the Hauge following. This first church blew down soon afterwards and another was built at the corner of Erie and Franklin streets and Rev. Paul Anderson, who came to Chicago from Beloit in 1848, was established as pastor. He had been ordained in the Augustana Synod and was the first Norwegian Lutheran preacher to open a church in Chicago, if we except Elling Eielsen, who preached

[26] Knut Anderson Saude, — later known as John Anderson, — who, with Ivar Lawson, founded *Skandinaven* in 1866, came with his parents to Chicago in 1845. He was then nine years old. Two other sons died on the trip to America. A daughter was afterwards born in Chicago. In Norway Knut Anderson had been a playmate of Knud Henderson, now living at Cambridge, Wisconsin, as also of Knute Nelson (Kvilekval), later United States senator, who was born in Voss in 1843 and who came to Chicago with his mother in 1849. John Anderson's father, Anders Knutson Saude, died of cholera in 1849. *Skandinaven* was a success as a newspaper from its beginning. Early in 1866 Marcus Thrane had started a paper, *Den Norske Amerikaner*, in Chicago, but it was soon absorbed by *Skandinaven*. John Anderson died on February 24, 1910.

[27] *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 29, 1924.

chiefly in private houses. Eielsen had a sort of log meeting house on the north side before this.

The Vossings were quite active along business, political and social lines until after the Civil War, but gradually church troubles crept in and broke up their organizations. Among their leaders whom I remember were Ivar Lawson, Lewis Newton, Lewis Johnson, Lewis Brown (Lars Brun), Endre Testdal, Nils Ellertson and my two brothers Bryngolf and Rognald. The society raised quite a fund for helping poorer people to come to this country. Mr. Lawson and others made several trips to Norway in aid of this work. Mr. Lawson had been a tailor in Norway. He became quite a business man. At first he was active in church work and sang in the choir, but he left the church as he prospered.

Our social gatherings in those days were very pleasant. The young people had frequent meetings, particularly during the long winter evenings. We met in private houses, with occasionally a gathering at some public hall. The more mature men formed a debating society which was quite a feature of our life. A large room had been fitted up in the steeple of the church over the entrance and back of the organ and gallery and here weekly meetings were held. A great deal of eloquence was heard at these meetings from such men as Lawson and others.

About 1853, I think, we had a visit from Ole Bull, then at the height of his fame. We entertained him in Paul Anderson's church and gave him a banquet in the market hall on the north side. This building had a sort of city market below and a hall upstairs. Lawson acted as manager at the banquet and I was the hat boy. I sat opposite Ole Bull at the banquet and as I had once driven him on a trip through Voss he took quite an interest in me, asking me many questions about my life and plans. He spoke at both the church and the banquet, but I remember I did not think him half as interesting a speaker as a player.

Political upheavals and the gradual coming on of the Civil War brought new concerns to all citizens and changed conditions generally, with the result that the emigration society ceased its activities. The purposes of such an organization had already been achieved, however. A deep and broadening stream of Norwegian immigration had continued to flow into the country in the fifties and assistance from American sources was scarcely necessary any longer. The Vossing element itself had begun to spread over much of the domain of the

Northwest. Immigrant colonies were founded in Iowa, Minnesota, Dakota Territory, and many other states and territories. An important work had been done that was to influence sensibly the pioneer community life of the time and to lend strength and color to the story of the transplanted nationality.

EMIGRATION AS VIEWED BY A NORWEGIAN STUDENT OF AGRICULTURE IN 1850

A. Budde's "From a Letter About America"

Translated by A. Sophie Bøe, with an Introduction by Theodore C. Blegen

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago Professor Foerster took occasion to point out that although one hears both of an immigration problem and of an emigration problem, there is, strictly speaking, only a migration problem.[1] The historical approach to the study of American immigration has given stimulus to the exploitation of this view. The emigrant and the immigrant are one and the same person, and to understand him the student obviously must know not only his story from the date of his arrival in America but also the complex European backgrounds from which this story is projected. In other words, one is dealing with international history. A chapter in the evolution of modern Europe merges with a chapter in the making of America.

The literature of emigration, in which are reflected not only the motives and the reactions of the emigrants themselves but also the currents of opinion, hostile or otherwise, that the movement generated in the Old World, is an enlightening source of information for the economic and social history of Europe. The document herewith presented in an English translation may be taken as an illustration of the foregoing generalization. Jan Adolph Budde's little book entitled *From a Letter about America* is one of the most interesting of the discordant notes in the chorus of Norwegian voices chanting of America in the forties and fifties. The volume was brought out at Stavanger in 1850 by the director of the

1 Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, vi (*Harvard Economic Studies*, vol. 20, Cambridge, 1919).

agricultural school of Stavanger *Amt,* and may be read as a reflection of the views on emigration held by a man who was professionally interested in modernizing agricultural methods in Norway about the middle of the nineteenth century. Budde had traveled widely in Europe before, in 1844, he became the head of the Stavanger agricultural school, established in that year. He conducted the school for more than thirty years, and in 1877 was knighted in honor of his service to Norwegian agriculture.[2] *From a Letter about America* is a vigorous argument against emigration. If in part it is based upon misinformation and if the author's bias leads him into some naïve claims, yet in certain respects he was undoubtedly right. As a special student of agricultural conditions he was on safe ground when he claimed that changes in agricultural methods, had they been made by the farmers of Norway would have brought them good returns. The immigrant in America, as he truthfully asserted, must change his farming methods completely. Why not change them in Norway? In other writings Budde urged farmers to install up-to-date machinery on their farms, to use fertilizers for their soil, and in general to modernize their methods; and on his own "model farm" he doubtless exemplified his theories.[3] Budde's book is historically interesting not only in connection with the agricultural problem in Norway but also in relation to the psychology of the prospective emigrant. If the author was unwarrantedly pessimistic about the situation in the United States, his treatise doubtless served as an effective antidote to the false hopes raised by glowing reports from America.

Budde's book sounds a constructive note that was typical of Norway in the fifties, for the period was one of vigorous economic improvement. Turning its back upon previously held *laissez-faire* views, the government organized a new department of the interior and embarked upon a number of important economic reforms. In 1851 the Storthing authorized the construction of the first Norwegian railway, which was completed in 1854. At the same time the state entered

[2] J. B. Halvorsen, *Norsk Forfatter-Lexikon,* 1814-1880, 1 : 507-508 (Christiania, 1885).

[3] For a list of Budde's writings, see Halvorsen, *Norsk Forfatter-Lexikon,* 1 : 508.

upon a vigorous road-building program, which tended to mitigate to some extent the isolation characteristic of the earlier part of the century. The first telegraph line in Norway — connecting Christiania and Drammen — was opened in 1855; and the telegraph and a new postal system played their parts in knitting together the communities of the land. The government attempted to aid the farmer by establishing a farm-loan system by which he was enabled to borrow money at lower rates than those available from private money-lenders. The fifties were also a period in which the question of agricultural education came to the fore, as indeed the student anticipates when he finds writers like Budde stressing agricultural reform, rather than emigration, as a solution of the problems confronting the Norwegian tillers of the soil. A national agricultural college was established in 1859 and has had since its founding a model farm. Agricultural schools began to lay the foundations for changes that were destined eventually to alter the character of Norwegian farming.[4]

Miss Bøe's translation of the Budde document was made from a typewritten transcript of a copy of the original in the library of the University of Oslo.

[TITLE PAGE]

From a Letter about America. By A. Budde, Director of the Agricultural School of Stavanger Amt. Stavanger. Published by C. Floor. Printed by Paul T. Dreyer. 1850.

[TEXT]

Spring is drawing near — strange desires begin to stir — birds of passage are flying — the weather-vanes point toward the West — America's undulating plains lie stretched out before the mind's eye. Let us start — they meet us at the shore — each tries to outdo the other — they offer us their steamboats and carry us toward those places where farms of a hundred *tønder*[5] cost only 125 specie-dollars, — there where

[4] J. Smitt, *Norges Landbrug i dette Aarhundrede* (Christiania, 1883); Knut Gjerset, *History of the Norwegian People*, 2: 515 (New York, 1915); *Norway: Official Publication for the Paris Exhibition*, 443, 470 (Christiania, 1900).

[5] A Norwegian *tønderland*, or *tønde land*, is a measure of land, 56,000 square feet. The author considers a *tønderland* about equivalent to an acre.

one reaps without fertilizing, — where each one can tap his own sugar from the trees. . . .

So these pictures have intoxicated you too — so you too want to go from eight hundred to nine hundred sea-miles across the ocean, and after that more than one hundred and fifty Norwegian miles[6] through the country to Wisconsin, and expose — I shall not speak of you, yourself — but your wife and your small children to the dangers and hardships of such a journey, stowed together in the filth and foul air under the deck of the ship for so long a time with seasickness all around you? Have you really assured yourself of conditions over there, and made your calculations? I must say that I have not yet seen a really comprehensive account of America, much as I have sought for it. Half truths and part commendation of this country, but almost always with this supplement, "I shall advise neither for nor against," in my eyes a suspicious qualification, which shows that America's advantages are, by no means, so entirely clear — I must assume, however, that the advantages are sufficiently emphasized, but not the disadvantages. Perhaps it is just this which has made you uncertain, since you ask for my opinion, although on the other hand you seem to have made your decision. This your wish I shall with pleasure grant you, and, for lack of anything better, give you what I know, and what I have obtained from entirely reliable sources, which I have sought, as I was surprised to learn that no one made money from farming in America, and that many who were well-to-do here lost all their possessions, and were forced to sell the farms which they had begun to cultivate.

I shall work out a computation for you just as it presents itself in the vicinity of Milwaukee, and found it on the prices prevailing there, which are as follows: 1¼ dollars per acre (about a Norwegian *tønderland*), forest as well as prairie-land. To plow an acre with furrows, 18 inches wide and 4 to 6 inches deep, the cost is 2½ to 3 dollars. The average crop is 25 bushels (about 6 barrels) of wheat per acre, and the price of this is 2 dollars a barrel. The highest it has ever been is 4 dollars — but grain has here too been more than

[6] A Norwegian mile equals about seven English miles.

double the price of what it is now. A man during harvest gets 1 dollar a day for cutting grain. To hire a horse costs 1 dollar a day. The price of a horse is from 40 to 100 dollars. An ox costs from 30 to 50 dollars. My informant paid 20 dollars a year in taxes for 100 acres of uncultivated land. Since grain is so cheap and wages so high, it would not be possible to thresh with a flail, but threshing-machines go about threshing for a price of 5 skillings a bushel — 20 skillings a barrel — though without cleansing. The straw is considered of no value, since one does not fertilize, partly because the new soil is fertile for a long time without manure — neither have most of the Norwegians been able to build stables but tie their cattle to the walls of their houses in the winter, and this often causes them to die miserably in the snow. Money in America is loaned out at 10 to 12 per cent — a higher interest is unlawful. The cost of planting an acre with wheat, which is the common seed, can be computed in the following way:

Plowing	2 specie dollars	2 ort	12 skillings[7]
Harrowing Sowing	1	2	12
Seed sown 1½ bushel	—	3	18
Harvesting	3	—	—
Threshing and Cleaning	1	1	—
Hauling to Market (Milwaukee, 20 English miles)	3	—	—
Total	11 specie dollars	4 ort	18 skillings
Receipts 25 bu. wheat	12 specie dollars		
Expenditures	11 specie dollars	4 ort	18 skillings
Balance			6 skillings

From this you will see that there is absolutely no advantage in owning land in the far West, and still less so when from this the interest on the funds invested, and on the capital for carrying on the business is also counted. It is quite different in the eastern states, for the price of grain is much higher there, but there too the land in certain sections is much more

7 A skilling is equivalent to about one cent in American money; and one *ort* equals 24 skillings.

expensive than in Norway. I know that it has happened that grain and other products have brought such low prices that it has not paid to harvest excellent crops, but they have been left to rot in the fields; this has caused a strong stench which has been looked upon as the cause of diseases breaking out. (Ohio 183[1] [*sic*]). You can then see that one cannot get a living merely from owning land far out there in the West; on the contrary, one gets it only from one's personal work — for besides the expenses stated you will have many more: 20 dollars in taxes for a hundred acres (uncultivated), fences (fence-wire), roads, houses, etc., etc., to construct and keep in repair.

If we want to make a comparison with my business here in Stavanger *Amt,* it would, figured according to an average crop on my farm, give the following result with a rotation of crops of: oats, root vegetables, wintergrain or barley, five-year grass: average surplus 18 dollars per acre. Fertilizing is in this case, for the years the land is used for field, added to the expenditures with the big sum of 10 dollars, 11 skillings, the average for a year. The capital which is invested in the field is assumed to be 100 dollars per acre, and interest is computed on this as well as on the capital needed to carry on the business. However, in order that you can judge my figures correctly, I shall add another, for example, for potatoes:

Working of soil, etc.	14 specie dollars	2 ort	23 skillings
Manure	13	—	—
Seed sown			
8 barrels at 1 dollar	8	—	—
	35 specie dollars	2 ort	23 skillings
To this I want to add the interest on capital invested and for carrying on business, which was not counted in the computation for America	6	—	—
	41 specie dollars	2 ort	23 skillings
Receipts: 80 barrels at 4 ort, including hay	67	—	—
Profit	25 specie dollars	2 ort	1 skilling

You see that personal work is better paid in America, but farming is far, far more profitable in Norway.

Those, on the other hand, who prefer to work for others, or work by the day, very likely are better off than the menial workers in Norway, provided only that they are fortunate enough to keep their good health and that they can endure to compete with the native Americans, both of which, however, have their difficulties. Unbiased people from this part of the country have told me that a man in America must do several times as much work (three?) as is customary here in a day. My chief informant — a Norwegian returned from America — as an example, told of people who had worked themselves to death. The work is so violent and so forced that Norwegians think, on their arrival in America, that they can by no means endure it, but they are forced to — there is nothing else they can do, and after a long time of torment they work, if not exactly abreast of the Americans, then at least with them. If servants or laborers can force themselves to go through this purgatory, and if they want to risk the climate, which is unhealthful for Norwegians, they may, to be sure, do well as far as earnings are concerned — although, no doubt, many things which require much work, for example, boots and shoes, and the like, are pretty expensive. If, on the other hand, they become sick, they have, for the most part, lost the game. Not always can one count on help — Rynning, who had helped many people, died, entirely helpless, not far from the door of his house, which he was unable to reach.[8] Sickness carries away a great number of the Norwegian immigrants, and if they do recover from it they are not well, or the disease may

8 This is a mistake. The episode referred to was a trip made by Rynning in the winter of 1837-38. "In the middle of the winter he walked almost barefoot across a prairie; he was near his house, but he could not reach it without help; and he was almost frozen stiff when people found him and brought him home," writes a Dr. Brandt, who visited the western settlements in 1840. Ansten Nattestad, a friend and neighbor of Rynning, refers to the trip as an "exploring expedition," and remarks, "The ice on the swamps and the crusts of snow cut his boots. He finally reached the colony, but his feet were frozen and lacerated. They presented a terrible sight, and we all thought he would be a cripple for life." It was after Rynning's return from this trip and while he was confined to his bed that he wrote his *True Account of America for the Information and Help of Peasant and Commoner.* His death occurred the next fall, in September, 1838, probably from malaria. See Blegen, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America*, 12-14.

recur again and again for several years. My informant had this sickness for some time and was cured several years ago, but still has slight touches of it, he who formerly had had such excellent health. The principal sickness that attacks the Norwegians is a bad malignant ague; but consumption too is very common, and is caused by the climate; yes, it is such a bad disease, even for the native Americans, that wealthy people often spend the summers in the West Indies for the sake of their health, three hundred and fifty sea-miles south of New York. It is of course well known to you that most of those who emigrated last year are already dead. After all it is a well-known truth, and proved by statistics, that in no country in the world is the average length of life so long as in Norway. From this, it seems to me, one ought to be able to infer that Norway is a good place to live in, and when I think about it, I wonder why so many want to emigrate; it is of no use to depend on youth and health; and crowded as it may indeed seem to many people, there still is sufficient room in our church yards.

In regard to dwelling-places, America offers very little. The first thing one must think about, when one wants to settle down, is to go into the woods to chop down trees. But in order to build, many difficulties present themselves because of the lack of lumber easy to handle. The real Americans build their homes of brick. The immigrants, in order to economize, build log-cabins of huge trunks of oak, which are hard to work with and to handle, and what is more, after they are placed in the walls they are in constant motion, and begin to curve, one day one way, and the next the other, and the clay which was forced into the openings the preceding day falls out again, and new clay must be forced in in another place. In most cases the Norwegians cannot afford the price of a wooden floor, but must be content with the bare ground for a floor. My informant, who is a very well-to-do man, and who has been in America for eight years, awakened on winter mornings to find snow, which had drifted in during the night, covering his bed.

What, then, are the advantages of America, you may ask, if they do not include money, health, nor conveniences?

"Oh well, over there they eat wheat bread, — and here rye or oaten bread." And still I must say that one of my greatest enjoyments on a trip abroad in 1838, was when I, after a stay in England and France where, in the beginning, I had enjoyed eating wheat bread, came to Hamburg and got a bite of rye bread. It was a delight — a vision of the mountains of my native land floated by. "But on the whole, one lives well, one eats much meat and pork." That is true, these things are cheap; they cost only one or two skillings for half a pound; but in the interior there is very little fish — just think of those people who are far from the sea, the Russian, for instance, how eager he is to get herring or other fish. "One can get one's own sugar by tapping the sap of the maple-trees and boiling it down." One can boil syrup from birch-juice too, and also from the root of the juniper bush (in Hallingdal they prepare juniper licorice), but it scarcely pays. Cane-sugar is, after all, the common sugar in America, and costs as a rule thirteen skillings a pound. And anyway, a sufficient number of maple trees to produce sugar will soon be a thing of the past, and only in rather sparsely settled places is it still possible to find any number. Many heavy articles which must be brought from the coast are rather expensive.

"I can, no doubt, make both ends meet in this country, for my own part," you will perhaps say; "I can, maybe, even live more comfortably here than in America, and avoid much adversity and trouble, but I do this for my children. What would there be from this impoverished manure-hungry soil, when we begin to divide the farms? Over there things grow without fertilizing — over there are wide expanses; if it ever becomes too populous around me then my children can move farther west."

But again I must ask you: So long as it is not yet too crowded for you here at home, why will you run the risk of this trouble? Why not leave it to your children to move farther west, as well from here as from your new farm in America? Or do you think that you have a better insight into these matters now than they will have in the future? If you are economical and industrious, then, no doubt, your property

will increase rather than decrease, and the same property ought, I should think, be sufficient after your death to take the same people across as are now planning to travel for it. Or do you think you can there undertake to divide farms indefinitely, which you think cannot be done here; then hear what experiences have been told from America. If you think that American soil is not subject to exhaustion, then hear what a reliable man, Professor Johnston, says about it: "General evidence of sure but slow exhaustion meets one in the history of agriculture in almost every country. Nowhere, however, is it more striking than in the old slave states in America; Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, once rich and fertile, have now become generally barren through a long-continued forced and exhausting cultivation, and enormous expanses are abandoned in hopeless sterility."

When my informant came to America he annually cut a piece of land that had a remarkably heavy growth of grass which reached almost up to his shoulders. He stayed over there for eight years, but the piece had, during the last years, fallen off so much that he did not consider it worth cutting. So quickly had it become exhausted. Or do you think that Norway cannot hold more people, that it is full? When you reach America you will be absolutely forced to begin using another method of farming, and to work much harder, no matter how much you are opposed to changing your system. Why not begin using a better mode of cultivation already here in your Fatherland, and your farm will maybe support both you and your children for many generations still. If you go to America you will learn something you never had believed. Now see, does not our land lie here uncultivated? The stones here with us are scarcely any worse than the roots of the oak trees in America. To be sure, there are several districts there, chiefly out near the sea, where the population is stowed together because of a few years of successful fishing, but where now very distinct signs of over-population are found, and where many farms ought rather to be laid out for the grazing of sheep than have any more time wasted on them. Not any farther away than in the district of Jaederen there

are to be found ever so many farms, which, if bought by several in partnership, could, no doubt, be divided into many parts, and could then by effective reclaiming and cultivation support the men clearing them as well as they now feed merely single families, and yield a much greater profit than the American farming does. In still other places this is the case, that it is the inefficiency of the man cultivating the soil which is the reason why people cannot live on their farms, and his stupidity is often so great that he does not even take the trouble to think of, trace out, and become familiar with anything better — slowness, yes, even laziness, is often too general to make it easy to free oneself of it. In America circumstances force one to straighten out both these matters.

Why, then, is America praised so much? This is not always done; there are many who have come home who do not praise it. There are many over there who even curse their emigration, but who now are forced to stay there. But still it is more often praised, and why? Now the reasons may be of various kinds: (1) Many have been fortunate and industrious, and have really worked their way up — in this country too one can be successful, and with persistence work one's way up. (2) Others praise it because to emigrate was their own idea, and few will admit, even to themselves, that they acted foolishly, but would rather, as long as possible, hold out, and defend the course which they have so far taken. (3) Many feel homesick and long for their relatives and think that by persuading them to come across they can still their longing. (4) Many people, who are by nature discontented, praise it because they hope for greater happiness than they find in the shadow of the old ridges to which they want to bid farewell forever; for more rest than by the swell of the familiar waves; for more peace on the long monotonous billows of America's prairies, in the melancholy log-cabins, than on the old familiar paths between neighbors, on which they ran so joyfully in their childhood; for greater love through a foreign tongue than through the sound of that language which gave to the soul of the child all its ideas, and in which it found a name for everything that was dear to it. Many have become tired of the homelike,

simple things; and why? — because discontent and peevishness have taken up their abode in their hearts, which before were so kind and glad — and for all this the native land must bear the blame. A Latin author, Horace, says, "Qui trans mare vehunt, coelum, non animum mutant," by which he means: Many a one who is troubled with a restless mind — be it peevishness, self-conceit, envy, covetousness, or whatsoever — thinks that when he gets far away among strangers it will become better than it has been; but he is mistaken. Contentment comes only when some day he has found humility, for without that there is everywhere the same opposition, the same obstacles, the same occasions for disappointment and sorrow. (5) How many letters from America do not tell of the eternal unrest, the constant moving: "I have sold my first farm and bought another farther west." One soon finds out that one has been fooled — one is anxious to get rid of that which one has bought — one buys up more land in order to foist it upon immigrants who do not have a roof over their heads — one soon learns the trick in the selling of farms, which is like horse-trading in this country — and the more people that come over, the more sale of farms, and the more new immigrants, the more cheap laborers to be had; for when they have been there for some time they will no longer work for the first price. There are even those who hire many servants here in this country, and on promise to pay their passage across, engage them to work for a long time without pay, but usually they were fooled when they leased themselves, for when they get over, the contract is broken, which, as far as I know, is not considered binding in America.

The awful speculation going on among the Americans soon infects the immigrants. It matters not what is the object of the speculations — articles of merchandise, cattle, or men. There is more speculation in men, I dare say, than in cattle. It is said that a cargo of immigrants sells for a tolerably fair price to a steamship company. From the moment an immigrant has set his foot on American ground, the speculators begin to cast covetous glances on him as an object of pecuniary gain; and he does not escape their clutches even though he

thinks he has buried himself in the western wilderness. There they pursue him — examine into his right to enter into the country, if it might be possible in some legal, but roundabout way, to oust or wring from him the fruits of many years of hard labor in the sweat of his brow, or press out of him sums of money or work. Arbitrary treatment, even in the courts of justice, is not uncommon, and it would profit a foreigner very little to set himself in defiance. However, that the last-named disgraceful speculation has ever been carried on by Norwegians is a thing I have never heard. I only want at this time to show you the height of speculation in regard to immigrants, and beg you to be careful. (6) It is sufficiently known that Americans have begun to praise themselves, and everything over there, so exceedingly much at the expense of the Old World. I do by no means deny that they are a very able people — they sometimes in derision call even the Norwegian immigrants Indians. The immigrants hear this repeated so often that they learn the habit too, even though they do not always carry it so far as the man who wrote home and told about his nine pigs — he had but one sow that he hoped would bring forth eight pigs. Another man who came back from America, had two gold coins which he always carried with him, and whenever that country was spoken of, he would produce these as an example of the abundance which that country offered. It was said he did not possess much more than these two coins, worth perhaps about ten dollars. Many have come back poorer than when they went across, only to settle down again in the land of their birth. Those who are entirely impoverished or are dead have good reasons for not returning. Many who have come back speak about going over again; but nothing comes of it for most of them; others have become so entangled in affairs over there, that they must return; or they have come back to hire people or to persuade others to go back with them. Only a few will admit that they have acted unwisely.

Nevertheless, it is, incidentally, strange that we are called upon to subscribe money to provide churches, schools, preachers, and so forth, for these rich boasting people. One might

rather think that they ought to be able to help us some time when we have a year of poor crops.

(7) Furthermore, those who convey immigrants across are profited by much praising of America. I do not know, however, of Stavanger people ever having carried on this business of sly recruiting as it has been done in some places, where masters of vessels or ships' officers have traveled into the country districts and deluded the poor peasants with all manner of rainbow-colored pictures of America.

Those who, probably, are the most successful in America are skilled workers — they are not quite so exposed to ague as the farmers — but they ought to be young people, for they must be content to begin as apprentices even though they have been master workmen here, seeing that they work in an entirely different way, and with different tools than they do here. Still, to be sure, I know of many craftsmen who have come back after having squandered away much money; I know of two capable carpenters who, on the way back from America, were lost entirely quite near their native land on the coast of Jutland.

As far as you are concerned I might predict the following outcome:

America offers you, in all likelihood: more meat to eat, a greater area of land to cultivate, more exertion, less comfort, a shorter life; now choose. Do you, in addition, want to give up your love for your childhood memories, your mother-tongue, your native home — as Esau did for a portion of food?

Now, I know you have a great longing for America; I will go no further so as not to irritate you. Even though I cannot restrain you from emigrating, still I can perhaps moderate your expectations about America so that you will not be quite so disappointed, as though I had not written to you — a disappointment which perhaps will be instrumental in making you more unhappy than necessary. Go then, when you simply cannot be contented here at home; however, always keep this in view: that no special good fortune awaits you over there in America, but rather adversity and hard work — perhaps even much of it, in case sickness and misfortune come to your home.

Finally I want to help you to consider if the reports that have come to you are written with sufficient knowledge and impartiality and not to serve the advantage of one or the other. You must use your acuteness in judging correctly in this matter. In regard to myself, then you can readily see that, happy as I am to hear from you once in a while — for we almost never come in closer contact — it is, after all, of no consequence to me whether you stay or go, only that I am interested in your welfare and it is because of this interest I have written these lines for your use, and presented to you the impressions each one of these accounts has made on me, and the total impression, which I have received of America. You would scarcely believe it, but there was a time when I was an enthusiast about this country — indeed, you may perhaps still remember my love for the outdoors and the simplicity of things — my admiration for America's two great men, in whose spirit I believed all the people lived. But my views have changed somewhat — if one here is entangled in the meshes of selfishness and speculation, which would profit by the greater simplicity and tameness of others, then I fear that to a still greater degree, it is the case over there: slavery is America's great scandal.

AN IMMIGRATION JOURNEY TO AMERICA IN 1854

A Letter Translated and Edited by Henrietta Larson

The letter herewith translated was written by Ole Olson Østerud to his brother in Norway in 1854, shortly after his arrival at the Muskego settlement in Wisconsin with a number of immigrants from Hurdalen, Norway. This letter was brought to America in 1871, and, since it was fading, was copied by Østerud himself. The following translation was made from the copy, but the original and the copy have been compared sufficiently to prove the accuracy of the latter. These letters, together with miscellaneous writings of Østerud, were carefully saved by Mrs. Lena Aurlie of Ostrander, Minnesota, and are now in the possession of Professor Rølvaag of St. Olaf College.

Ole Østerud was a keen observer and a good writer. Though he had had only three days of formal schooling, he had opportunities to learn from an uncle, who was a schoolmaster, and in the household of Pastor Brun of Christiania, mentioned in the letter, for whom he worked as *gaardsgut*. That Østerud was of a somewhat more studious nature than the average immigrant may be inferred from the fact that he ranked first in his confirmation class of ninety members in the Feirings Church in Hurdalen. At the time of his emigration he was thirty-four years of age. He lived to be over ninety, and died in Fillmore County, Minnesota, where he had settled in 1856.

The following letter describes the journey from Christiania to Muskego and ends with a few comments on America. The letter is interesting not only because of the information which it contains but also because of what it reveals of the character, interests, and attitudes of the immigrants. Their dependence on nature and the elements is striking. The great distances were evidently impressive to them as well as to those for whom the letter was written. Their admiration for Captain

Müller of their vessel, "Fædre Minde," is rather touching. Some interesting points are given about the hardships as well as about the pleasures of the journey. It is seen that the immigrants were deeply religious and, also, that they were fond of amusement. Not the least illuminating are the statements about conditions in America, which are better, it is implied, than the people at home may believe. The many details in this letter may be accounted for by the fact that Østerud kept a daybook on the trip.

Racine County, Wisconsin
June 21, 1854

Dear Brother,

Since we have arrived with good fortune at our destination, I must write you as I promised and tell you about our journey.

We boarded the ship on the tenth of April. Pastor Bruun came and gave us a farewell sermon. At five o'clock in the morning of the eleventh we lifted anchor. The wind was favorable so that we passed Færder Lighthouse at five in the afternoon. We reached Arendal at four in the morning and Christiansand at four in the afternoon. Then we sailed northward toward Bergen, and on the afternoon of the fifteenth we saw the land of Norway the last time. The last we saw of Norway was high snow-capped mountains.

On the sixteenth a storm arose from the southeast, which lasted until the afternoon of the seventeenth, when we came within shelter of the Shetland Islands, which we passed on the north. We saw Feiril Lighthouse and at six o'clock in the morning we entered the Atlantic Ocean. After that we had a good wind until the twenty-third, so that we usually sailed eleven miles in a watch (a watch is four hours). We had clear weather until the twenty-second and then a little rain and later head wind until the thirtieth of April. On the first of May we had the most severe storm of the whole trip. It came from the northwest and later from the west, lasting until the fifth; then it was calm until evening, when a southwest wind arose, so that we made eleven miles in the watch. During the night before the sixth of May we crossed the outermost

Newfoundland Bank.[1] The following night we almost ran into a floating iceberg, which was much higher than the ship's masts, and on the seventh we saw three large icebergs, which you can believe was a remarkable sight.

We reached the Grand Bank of Newfoundland on the eighth of May, and there we fished on the eighth, ninth, and eleventh. We got seventy cod. Our fishing lines were forty fathoms long, so they reached the bottom, and the hooks were large and strong. Those who fished pulled and pulled and jerked the lines till they felt they had caught something, and some found the hook caught in the belly of the fish, the tail, the back, or wherever it might happen. It mattered not whether one had bait, for few had bait on the hook. So the cod was really a fool.[2] There must have been an abundance of cod on the bottom. They weighed about one Bismer pound,[3] some more and some less. So we all had fish to eat a couple of times, and it was very good.

After that we had head winds until the fifteenth, when we had a favorable wind. About half past seven in the morning our captain saw America, but later the air became so dense that we could not see land even though we sailed terrifically until noon, when we ran into a lot of floating ice so we could go no farther. Some thirty-six ships lay cruising about here and there, unable to advance, and here we, too, had to lie, and because of ice and fog we could go no farther till the twenty-fourth. At ten o'clock of the forenoon of that day we saw America. On the twenty-fifth we sailed past St. Paul, a light-house on a small island in the center of the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, 820 [1820?] sea miles from Christiania and 140 miles from Quebec (a sea mile is 11,862 *alen*[4]). Land, with forests and mountains as in Norway, could here be seen on both sides. There was still considerable snow on the right, but flatter land, quite uninhabited, on the left. We did not see land again before the morning of the twenty-seventh. At nine in the morning of the thirtieth we took a pilot on board

[1] This is apparently the eastern margin of the Grand Bank.
[2] The pun in the original is untranslatable: *Torsken var rigtig en Tosk.*
[3] A Bismer pound is the equivalent of thirteen and two-tenths pounds.
[4] An *alen* is a Norwegian measure of distance equivalent to two feet.

ten miles from Quebec. Here we saw land on both sides, with smoke rising everywhere on the left where settlers were clearing and burning. A little farther on, the country was built up on the left; and still farther, on the right, also. In the afternoon of June first we reached an island where a doctor lived. We anchored at this point, and at nine in the morning of the second the doctor came on board. Fifteen minutes after eleven that evening we anchored in Quebec Harbor.

No one was allowed to land before a doctor had come on board and examined us. He came at nine the morning of the third. We were then allowed to land, and at twelve o'clock on the third of June we stepped onto American soil for the first time. Quebec is a large town with many beautiful churches and some sixty thousand inhabitants. On the fourth of June we were in several churches, both Catholic and others. The day after Pentecost, the fifth of June, was a working day here. The first man we talked with after landing was Elias Stangeland, who is agent for a transportation line running inland. On this line the charge to Milwaukee was seven specie dollars, three marks, and eight shillings.[5] Our captain was to arrange for our transportation, however, and we finally went by the Holfeldt line.[6] On this line the charge was one specie dollar more and seventy-five cents for each hundred pounds of baggage above one hundred pounds, which were carried free of charge. On the sixth of June a small steamboat came alongside our ship and took us to the pier. There we boarded a large steamboat with two engines.

We left Quebec at five in the afternoon. There were some eight hundred people on this boat, but it would have been permitted to carry fourteen hundred. There were Norwegians, Swedes, Irish, and German, black negroes and brown Indians. The distance from Quebec to Montreal is 180 English miles. We arrived at Montreal at ten in the morning of the seventh. This is the most beautiful city we have seen and has the largest church, and many other large churches besides. At Montreal our baggage was hauled by horses

5 An amount equivalent in all to a little over nine dollars.

6 Holfeldt seems to have represented steamboat companies and the Great Western Railroad in Canada and the Michigan Central from Detroit to Chicago.

and wagons up to a canal where we boarded a steamer again. This boat did not leave before nine in the morning of the eighth. We passed through a canal having twenty locks. We passed many stopping places and arrived in Kingston at eight o'clock in the evening of the ninth. Here we boarded a much larger boat, which left at once to cross Lake Ontario. We passed many ports and arrived at Hamilton at half past three in the afternoon of the tenth. The distance from Montreal to Hamilton is 410 English miles. At this place our baggage was weighed and we took a train for Detroit. The train left Hamilton at twelve during the night and arrived at Detroit at ten the following morning. The distance from Hamilton to Detroit is 186 English miles. At Detroit we crossed the river by steamboat. We left, again, by train at one in the afternoon and arrived at Chicago at nine in the evening of the twelfth. From Detroit to Chicago is a distance of 278 English miles. We remained there till morning, when our baggage was transferred to the pier. We went by steamboat to Milwaukee, leaving at nine in the morning of the thirteenth. The distance from Chicago to Milwaukee is ninety English miles. We arrived in Milwaukee at four in the afternoon of the same day. We stayed there till nine in the evening of the fifteenth, when we hired a driver to take us to Tosten Søgaarden, a distance of twenty English miles, where we arrived at four in the morning of the sixteenth of June. And thus our journey was ended.

I might well have more to relate, but I cannot begin to tell of everything we saw. That would be too ambitious. I must tell you more, however, about our trip. After we had lifted anchor, our captain gave us a talk, explaining our duties, urging us to be cleanly, obedient, alert, and helpful to one another, and advising us to observe the rules posted in several places on the boat. He then asked God's blessing on us all. And so our journey was started in God's name.

Our captain was a fine man. He maintained strict discipline and kept everything clean and in as good order as it was possible for him to do. Because of this his passengers were always comfortable. He was like a father to us all.

We had no sickness on the boat, except seasickness, which made its appearance the very first evening. There were many, especially women, who had to keep to their berths during the entire trip. Gulbrand and I escaped fairly well. We did not throw up a single time. The weather was cold during the whole trip, but we had to dress well and stay on deck as much as possible when the weather permitted. We had a severe storm during which a wave tore away a long piece of the deck-bulwarks. We were all in pretty good spirits, however. We were not locked in and were allowed to go on deck as much as we wished. One had to be careful, though, to keep a firm hold so as not to be swept away. You may know the ship lurched a-plenty! When the weather was pleasant, we often had a good time, for all kinds of games and amusement were allowed. We frequently danced. Even the captain, himself, was often with us, entertaining us with adventure and hunting stories and the like. On the evening of the day after Pentecost we had a ball. We each gave twelve cents and the captain contributed the rest.[7] We had three musicians, and then we danced and drank till late in the night. We each contributed a little money and bought a gold watch chain for our captain. It cost fifteen dollars.

The charges for carrying our baggage inland were paid at Quebec, and it was agreed that we were to be free from all expenses, pier charges and everything, except to pay overweight charges, until we reached Milwaukee. We paid seventy-five cents for overweight, but we also had to pay a pier charge of fifty-five cents.

In Milwaukee we stopped at a Norwegian boarding house kept by a man named Claus Hanson. We paid one dollar to get our baggage hauled to Tosten Søgaarden's. Hence the entire transportation charge from Quebec to Tosten's was about eleven dollars.[8]

There were no deaths on the whole trip, but a child was born while we lay in the Bay of St. Lawrence. Two days

[7] According to the diary kept by Østerud, German immigrants on another boat lying in Quebec Harbor were invited to this dance.

[8] Judging by the total cost, this must have been specie dollars, or a little more than thirteen American dollars.

later the child was baptized by the captain. A woman from Gjærdrum gave birth to twins during the night when we were between Quebec and Montreal. Our captain baptized these babies, also, the next day in Montreal.

We parted with our captain in Montreal. We were comfortable while we were on the ocean compared with what we experienced going inland. There was always so much commotion, and there were so many transfers. And everything had to go in such a hurry as if life were at stake. If one were not on time, one would have to wait until the next day, which we surely learned in Chicago. When we had almost finished loading our baggage, the boat started, leaving several passengers, some of whose baggage was on the boat and some on the pier. They did not arrive in Milwaukee until the following day.

And so we have arrived in good condition. Lars Gullickson bought a farm for nine hundred dollars the first day we were here. I must tell you something about how things are here. The houses are generally not large, but the farms are beautiful.

Tosten's circumstances are exactly as he has written. He has a large farm and much stock. I have not counted his cows, but I have seen that he has seven calves, two large oxen, twenty-three geese, and a lot of chickens. As far as food is concerned here in America, there is an abundance. Even though I tell you so, you will perhaps all think it a falsehood. Concerning wages, conditions are as you have heard before. To-day I was offered twelve dollars a month and keep, but I did not accept, for I expect to get more.

Another time I shall write you further about America. I must close for this time. At this very moment the rest of the people from Hurdalen are arriving here. All are well.

With friendly greetings to you all from yours,

Ole O. Østerud

CHICAGO AS VIEWED BY A NORWEGIAN IMMIGRANT IN 1864

A Letter Translated and Edited by Brynjolf J. Hovde

Democracy is writing its biography, at last. The interest in social history evidenced by the first volume of the monumentally conceived *History of American Life,* edited by Professors Schlesinger and Fox, is compelling historians to search for new or hitherto neglected sources. Parallel with this movement, and in its larger aspect a phase of it, there is a growing demand for the investigation of the causes and effects of emigration and immigration. To both fields of historical endeavor the letters passing between European immigrants into America and their connections in the " old country " must prove extremely fertile source material. The newly arrived immigrant, by the very fact of being unidentified with American life, was sometimes able to turn upon it an observational power of unusual acuteness; furthermore, these wholly personal documents are likely to be peculiarly revealing, both of the immigrant mind and of the process of readjustment. How much more accurately the causes of great popular movements could be assessed if historians had available a large collection of such letters, than when, as now, they are compelled merely to infer them from government statistics and from plausible coincidences! Similarly, students of European history would gain from the letters of those who remained behind a much more intimate knowledge of the effects of emigration and of the reflex action of America upon Europe.

A letter written by an emigrated Norwegian to someone whom he left behind has always in Norway been placed in a class by itself as a matter of almost public interest, and has been called *Amerika-brev,* — " America letter." It is impossible to overestimate the importance of such letters in stimulating emigration and in acquainting the common people of Norway with American life. Among Norwegian immigrants a letter from the old home has also been a matter to share

with fellow immigrants, and is known as a *Norges-brev*, "Norway letter."

The particular "America letter" here translated was written by Christian H. Jevne to his parents in Hamar, Norway. Jevne spent his boyhood in Hamar, where his father was a master tanner.[1] Upon finishing the public school, he was sent to Vigness, a small trading point at the head of Lake Mjøsen, across the water from the better-known town of Lillehammer. There he was placed with an uncle, Ole Kolberg, who operated a general store. "Vigness was a small place of twenty-five or thirty houses, the trade being mostly with the farming community, so he found plenty of time for study, music, and gardening of which he was very fond. This may surprise those who knew him in later years when business seemed to be the all absorbing passion with him." In Vigness he proved his ability as a business man, and became the manager of his uncle's establishment. But an "America letter" from an emigrated uncle, Otto Jevne, in Chicago, the first in fifteen years, was destined to change his whole life. "At the same time advance copies of 'Chicago Illustrated,' published by Jevne and Almini [his uncle's firm in Chicago], copies of which are to be found in the Chicago Historical Society, were sent home with description [*sic*] of the wonderful city springing up on the shores of Lake Michigan." On July 4, 1864, Christian H. Jevne landed in New York, and proceeded at once to Chicago. There his uncle, a prominent fresco painter, helped him obtain a position with Knowles Brothers, with whom he did so well that after only ten months he was selected to be a partner of their brother-in-law, one Mr. Parker, whom they wished to see well started in business. In October, 1866, Mr. Jevne's two brothers Hans and Carl joined him in Chicago upon his own request; then he bought out his partner, and placed his brothers in the store. Both of them had studied English for two years in Norway in the expectation of coming to America. Mr. Jevne made excellent

[1] These notes on Mr. Jevne's life have been condensed from a more complete statement written by Mr. Carl Jevne (a brother who joined him in Chicago in 1866), and very courteously submitted to the translator by Mrs. Clara Jevne Haugan, a daughter of Mr. Christian H. Jevne, who lives at Evanston, Illinois. The quotations are taken from this statement.

progress in business, and though he was burned out by the fire in 1871 his energy, reliability, and capacity enabled him quickly to regain his former position. He operated what for many years was the largest wholesale and retail grocery business in Chicago. "It may be of interest to know that the first electric light used in Chicago was installed in the Jevne store in 1880 by the Edison Co. and the coffee roaster and mill was also run by electricity. Crowds jammed the street night after night to witness the illumination." Christian H. Jevne died in 1898, a prosperous and highly respected citizen of Chicago.

Chicago, December 10th, 1864

Dear Parents!

As I had already begun to fear, that my letter had not come through,[2] I was just in the act of writing to you, when Uncle on the 5. Nov. brought me a letter from O. Kolberg which destroyed my doubt, it had worried me a great deal that you perhaps remained uncertain whether I had reached my destination or not, and I knew that that would have caused you great uneasiness, which was unnecessary, as I not only am safely arrived, but also have been well the whole while, and am getting along in every way as well as one could wish, considering that I am in a strange land, and among strange people, and a strange language, for I can not get these cussed [3] Yankees to speak Norwegian, I therefore have to jabber English all day long, it is far from being of the best, but that makes no difference, because they are used to broken English. My word![4] How the English language is mutilated here, Frenchmen and Italians especially deal with it in a barbarous manner.

Never a day passes in which I do not send a thought over to dear Norway, in recollection of you my precious parents, and of relatives and friends as well. Oh, what a joyous day

2 The translator has endeavored to preserve, as far as possible, all the peculiarities of composition and punctuation that appear in the original; Mr. Jevne appears to have been a trifle weak in punctuation. But the letter is an interesting human document, simple, straightforward, and unpretending.

3 *Disse hersens Yankeir.* The word *hersens* is untranslatable; it is slang in Norwegian, and perhaps the nearest approximation to it in English slang is "cussed," or "darned," or "blamed"; it is too mild for "damned."

4 The Norwegian has *Hutetu,* an untranslatable expletive.

it will be for me when I once again set foot on the cliffs of Norway. (They are quite as dependable as America's stoneless, sandy soil.) and that the great happiness, might be vouchsafed me, to see you once again. I am coming home some time, provided God will let me live and keep my health. You may be sure I had a good many moments of hesitation before I could make up my mind to undertake so long and uncertain a journey, and to leave the Wignes [*sic*] which has become so dear to me it was absolutely one of the hardest days I have experienced, when I left Wignes and when I left you, my dear parents, weeping on the dock, not knowing whether I should be able to see you again or not, but all things pass, the farther I got along on the way the better it became, because then I had to think about finding my way through to my destination, although I wished in a small way that I could have turned back, but when one is aboard the train one must travel with it. Perhaps it was as wise as it was bad for me that I got the impulse to come here, for I must admit, in order not to be unfair to this country, that there are better and more numerous chances [5] for young men here than in Norway, when they once become familiar with conditions here, but when one arrives and gets off at the railway station, comes out upon the street, and does not know which way to turn, and besides cannot speak with people, then one is likely to wish he were back home, and that he never had seen America, but it would not go any better with an American if he should come to Norway under the same circumstances. Very likely there are many who set out in the belief that they will find here both wealth and ideal conditions,[6] but alas, how bitterly are they disappointed in their expectations, here one must work, for here nothing may be had for nothing.

There are many here, perhaps the greater number, who waste what they earn, by frequenting the dance halls and the saloons, there are any number of such delights.

I am still with the same man,[7] and we get along pretty well,

[5] The writer uses the Norwegianized form of the English word "chances," thus, *chancer*.

[6] The original reads *baade Guld og grønne Skove*, literally "both gold and green forests," an idiom which connotes riches and pleasures.

[7] That is, in the employ of the same firm, Knowles Brothers.

at first it was somewhat difficult, to be sure, as I had to stand there like a Hottentot able to do only what they pointed to, but now I can dispatch every customer that enters just as efficiently as a Yankee, and it is all about the same sort of thing as standing behind the counter at Wignes, except that I am occupied all the time, and must be in the store from 7 o'clock to 6:30 in the evening. I attend school in the evenings from 7 to 9, namely at a commercial institute, in order to learn English, bookkeeping, banking, and brokerage, this course costs 65 dollars, in greenbacks, (because here one gets 2½ dollars in paper for 1 dollar in gold). On Sundays I go up to my uncle's place to pass the time in his company and to chatter English with my small cousins, for they cannot speak Norwegian, although, they understand it when it is spoken to them, but always answer in English. Uncle's family consists of his wife three boys and one girl, his wife's mother is also here now, whereas she usually stays with her son out in the country The daughter of Almini is also staying with Uncle, because Almini's wife is dead leaving only this one child. Uncle and Almini do a good business, and they have a very good reputation here in Chicago, and in many of the larger cities hereabouts The Yankees tell me that Uncle is one of the foremost fresco-painters here. I have promised many, who desired to journey hither, that I would write to them about this country, but I shrink from fulfilling these promises, partly because I do not know of anything to say about the land or the agriculture, for I have not been outside the city limits since I came here, and partly because I certainly do not want to advise anyone to leave, if they want to leave then let them start off at once, that is what I did. I wish Hans would exert himself to learn English, for I might perhaps desire to have him here after a while; I could wish that you were all here, but that is out of the question, because it is much too long and difficult a journey for old people.

It might perhaps be interesting to you to hear a little something about this city, which is not more than thirty years old and now numbers about 200,000 inhabitants. Chicago is situated as you know on the shores of Lake Michigan, from

which a stream or river leads into the city and branches off in two directions, on this river there pass the whole day long, hundreds of steam and sail ships, and at the points where the streets cross the river there have been constructed swinging bridges, which are swung about by two men when the ships pass. The streets are very wide and long. Some over one Norwegian mile,[8] the sidewalks of which are made of slabs of white stone in the best part of the city elsewhere of planks. In most of the streets there have been laid rails, on which very handsome cars are operated, quite similar to railway coaches, which are drawn by two horses, it costs five cents to travel upon them either for a short or a long distance. There are about seventy churches here, of which three Norwegian two Swedish, and a great number German, for about half of the population here are Germans, as far as that goes there are all nationalities here, and therefore also all religions, such as Jesuits, Mormons, Methodists and also a great multitude of Catholics, who make an awful noise. I have been in both Norwegian Swedish and English churches, in the latter they sing most beautifully. The churches are prettily painted, and equipped with stoves, so that one does not have to freeze there The houses are mostly built of stone, (white), 4 to 7 stories high. there is a hotel in the same street as I live, which is 7 stories, has 220 windows facing the street, and about 400 rooms Uncle did the decorating of the best rooms in this hotel.

About the war it can hardly be of any use to speak, inasmuch as you are quite as well informed about it as I, suffice to say, they are fighting as usual, and the Union army has now been quite successful of late. People have been greatly wrought up now for a while over the presidential election, for here all people are politicians (mostly political boiler-smiths).[9] Some Democratic, who wanted McClellan for President, others Republicans who voted for Lincoln, who furthermore was reëlected. You may greet Bookbinder Magnussen [10]

[8] A Norwegian mile is equivalent to about seven English miles.

[9] The original reads *Politiske Kandestøbere.* Ludvig Holberg satirized the petty politician in a play called *Den politiske Kandestøber;* Mr. Jevne here succumbs to the temptation to make a clever allusion.

[10] In Norway the word denoting a person's occupation is used in connection with his name, whether it be an exalted or a very humble occupation, as a title both of honor and of identification.

and tell him that I have met his brother-in-law, and delivered the pictures, which they were very happy to receive They asked me to send their greetings when I wrote home. I should also have written to my sisters Anne and Agnethe, but I suppose you can send them this, and I would further ask you to give my regards to Madam Hoff, and to Holmens, also to my good friend Holdtfodt, and tell him further that he must not go to America, he would only suffer hardship in his old age.

I shall now close my letter,[11] with the request that you will greet all acquaintances and friends from me, and if opportunity affords also those up north in Wignes. If anyone whom you know sets forth to come over here then by all means[12] ask them to look me up, if they come to Chicago, something which is usual. They can inquire for Jevne and Almini No. 101 Washington Street. Last summer when I arrived it was so warm here that I did not know what to do with myself, and now it is just as cold as in Norway, if not colder. I regret that I did not manage to bring with me one of Tante Kolberg's feather comforters, for here they use nothing more than blankets on the beds. Now it is not long till Christmas, so my letter will reach you too late to wish you a Merry Christmas, for which reason I shall have to be content merely to wish you a Happy New Year, and I hope God will permit you to experience many joyful and happy days still. I wish I might be in Norway during the Christmas holidays. Space permits no more, therefore I will close with a heartfelt greeting from your forever devoted son.

Christian H. Jevne. (So long.)

Some time I am going to send a newspaper home, it costs no more than 4 cents. If you see that it comes through all right, then I wish you would send me a copy of *Morgenbladet,*[13] if it

11 The original has the quaint archaic *Jeg vil nu slutte min Skrivelse,* "I will now conclude my writing."

12 The text has *saa kjaere bed dem opsøge mig;* the word *kjaere,* "my dear," is used here in a sense that renders it impossible of literal translation; it indicates deep desire.

13 The newspaper *Morgenbladet,* then as now the most important in Norway, published at Oslo.

is not too expensive. It must be sent in a newspaper wrapper. You can write your name on that.

Christian.

One thing I had almost forgotten, namely, to greet you, from Uncle and family.

My address is Christian H. Jevne,
Chicago
P. O. Box 1175.

Kindly send the enclosed little message to M. O. Glemmestad Vignes.[14]

[14] According to Mr. Carl Jevne's statement, the writer here means M. O. Glemmestad in Vigness. Everywhere else in the letter the name of the town Vigness is spelled with a W.

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF CHURCH RECORDS

By J. Magnus Rohne

At some time in the future an historian will arise who will tell us just what religion has contributed to history. That the contribution has been a large one is an undoubted fact. Mohammedanism fired men to a furious frenzy and swept over large parts of Asia, over all of Northern Africa, and threatened Europe both from the east and from the west. The vast oriental systems of religion are still making history in China and other parts of the world. The influence of the Greek religion and philosophy has been of far-reaching importance. And there is the virile religion of the North, where Thor's hammer struck far and wide, sometimes for pillage, more often for conquest and order, but never for slavery and servitude.

Only a cursory glance is needed to recognize the contributions that the Christian religion has made to the history of the world. Certainly the average man knows more of the history of the Jewish race than of his own race. What other historical characters are so intimately known as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David? Our religious interest in these men has greatly enhanced our historical knowledge of them. That the popes and the Roman Catholic Church have played an important rôle in human history is universally acknowledged. At the time of the Reformation there occurred an upheaval that has affected human civilization in all its chief departments. Not only did great changes come over human thought and conceptions, but Europe witnessed a century of religious wars, beginning in 1547 and ending at the peace of Westphalia in 1648, when the map of the world underwent radical changes. In those struggles were planted seeds that bore abundant harvests of war and misery culminating in the World War in 1914. And the World War did not lack religious implications; let those who are inclined to doubt this merely recall the active participation of all the churches in that war. But history is not made out of wars — wars

are merely the crises that certain peace-time tendencies bring upon the human family.

Why has the church played such an important rôle in history? The explanation is to be found partly in the fact that the church both of the Old and the New Testament times has kept records of its deeds and teachings. This indeed is a part of its divine traditions. And so sedulously was this principle adhered to that it went into the blood of the leaders of the later Christian church. There are the letters of the martyrs, the works of the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, the histories of Josephus, Eusebius, and Socrates, the Codices of the Christian Emperors, the annals of the monks, and the *Liber Pontificalis*, or Pontifical Book. In the confusion arising from the barbaric invasions of Western Europe the church in the Middle Ages not only kept the records of its own history, but kept records of secular history as well. The obscure monk in his cold damp cell preserved for posterity accounts that have colored our history to this day. To illustrate: the Norsemen ran afoul of the monks in Ireland and in other places, scattering those that they did not put to the sword. In retaliation, the monks that survived sat down and wrote vivid accounts of these piratical forays, making the name of the Vikings synonymous with all that was ruthless and gruesome. For centuries the pens of the monks proved mightier than the Viking swords, and not until our generation have the Viking sagas been effectively checked against the annals of the monks. Only lately have the historians begun to see that the Vikings were law-givers instead of law-breakers and that peace and order followed the tumult of conquest. It was a case of pitting the pens of the Norsemen against the pens of monks, and the world was happy to get at the facts in the case. To give another example, history would have been vastly richer if we could have had the Saxon side of the struggle of the Saxons with Charlemagne, whose side is so ably presented by Einhard; but the Saxons were not Christians yet, and had no frail and anemic monks to keep the records of their proud and mighty chiefs. We shall, therefore, probably never know the many tales of valor which accumulated during the thirty-three years of

heroic Saxon struggle against Charlemagne. Surely there is many an unhallowed burial ground on which one could muse as Thomas Gray did:

> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid,
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
> Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed
> Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre!

In preserving history, as in shaping it, the pen is mightier than the sword. And because religion has stood back of the pen fully as often as it has stood back of the sword, it has contributed vastly to the history of the world.

Little argument is needed to prove the historical value of the church records of the Norwegians in America. The great need is to organize effectively the work of collecting and preserving these materials. Fortunately many of the churches have kept their own records systematically, and have thus simplified the historian's problem. On the other hand, some pastors and congregations have always regarded the matter of keeping church records as "nobody else's business," not recognizing that those who fail to keep them are delinquent in a public trust. The early Norwegian-American Lutheran church fathers belong to the Norwegian-Americans as a group, and in a broader sense to all Americans. Consequently the records of their activity are of general rather than of merely local or partisan interest. The task of the Norwegian-American historian is to have constantly wider groups view the church and other Norwegian-American institutions as integral parts of the great American life about us. The Norwegian-American *skolemester* did not realize that he was writing American and even world history when he, like the monk of old, bent over his papers in the bleak log hut and wrote his records in Norwegian script. Those who are intrusted with the responsibility of keeping the church records should get some of the spirit of the old monks who were vividly conscious that they were "making" history. Let them feel that it is to the interest of generations not yet born that none of these records be lost.

When this wider responsibility for and interest in the

church records become more generally recognized, the contemporary records will be kept more adequately than has been the case, and the records in general, both of congregations and of families, will be preserved more carefully. Furthermore, congregations and familes will feel less reticence in laying the records open to inspection by competent scholars, knowing that a recognized common interest, which is above partisan feelings and claims, places upon the historian a serious obligation. At times in the past the Norwegian-American church historian has been the object of a subtle mistrust, for he has been suspected of suiting his material to the pleasures of some cherished group or party. In so far as he has actually done this, he has failed in his high calling as an historian and has forgotten that the achievements of Eielsen, Clausen, Dietrichson, H. A. Stub, Laur. Larsen, H. A. Preus, Koren, Brandt, and other leaders are the common possession of all Norwegian-Americans and all Americans.

In accordance with the principle set forth above, the present writer claims a possessive interest, for example, in Elling Eielsen that is equal to that of the most belligerent Ellingian, and he deplores the fact that Eielsen had very little interest in keeping protocols. So far as is known, no records have been kept of Eielsen's work after 1839 save such as were later written by others. But in the latter there are of course possibilities for errors and omissions. Even when Eielsen was performing the tremendously important task of organizing the first Norwegian Lutheran Synod in America, he was so modest about it that he wrote no account of how it took place. Only a short letter and the "Old Constitution" are the records left to his curious spiritual descendants; and the letter speaks of elements lacking in the "Old Constitution" as we have it at present.[1] Of all that stirring and interesting history centering around Elling Eielsen nothing more of an official nature is found until 1854, when the Reverend P. A. Rasmussen issued an annual report for the Eielsen group.

[1] For this venerable document, the first church constitution among Norwegians in America, see J. Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872*, p. 105 ff. (New York, 1926).

From 1856 to 1861 Rasmussen issued *Kirkelig Tidende*, but this was of no value to the Eielsen group as Eielsen and Rasmussen separated shortly after the *Tidende* began to come out. There are some letters and, of course, some secondary source material from this period, but how would not our history have been enriched if Eielsen had caused some one to keep the records, even if he himself had not cared to bother about them. No matter how well-disposed the historian may be, he cannot begin to fill in the gaps caused by the absence of records. Strange as it may sound, the historian must depend more on Eielsen's enemies than on his friends for first-hand accounts. Anyone can readily see what a handicap is thus placed upon the scholar, who must constantly discount the adverse accounts of Eielsen's opponents without having the least idea where the discount should begin or end. No matter what the historian does, he can never be certain that he has done justice to all concerned. If Eielsen has any better friend than the writer, let him join in keeping a sharp lookout for first-hand material about this interesting man. Rasmussen's *Report of 1854*[2] should by all means be republished and the files of his *Kirkelig Tidende* should be completed.[3]

A very different situation confronts the historian when he begins to write the history of the former Norwegian Synod. At the outset he has the records of the work of organization as presented in the Reverend J. W. C. Dietrichson's *Travels among the Norwegian Emigrants in the United North American Free States*.[4] This book was published in 1846, but it carries the records of church work back to 1839 and the records of immigration back to 1825. Dietrichson kept accurate records, as did the other pastors of this group.

In 1851 a constitution was written, and though it was later rewritten and re-adopted, it served as the general basis upon

2 This *Report* covers the proceedings of the annual meeting of Elling Eielsen's group. There are sufficient contemporary references to prove that a report of 1854 or 1855 (possibly both) exists, though it is to be feared that only a very few copies of this extremely interesting document are in existence.

3 The Luther College Library has a file of Rasmussen's *Kirkelig Tidende*, though it lacks several issues. Other libraries are possibly similarly situated.

4 *Reise blandt de norske Emigranter i "De forenede Nordamerikanske Fristater"* (Stavanger). This is being translated by the author of the present article and will be published by the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

which the Norwegian Synod was organized in 1853. The first four paragraphs of the by-laws of this constitution take up the question of proper church records:

1. It devolves upon the president of the Synod to keep: 1. a copy-book of all official letters that have been sent or received; 2. through the secretary of the Synod a protocol of the proceedings of the Synod, which protocols are authorized by the Church Council and revised by the Synod.

2. It devolves upon the Church Council through its secretary to keep the following official records: 1. A protocol of proceedings; 2 a copy-book of official letters that have been sent and received, which protocols are authorized by the president of the Synod and revised by the Synod.

3. It devolves upon every pastor belonging to the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church[5] to keep the following official records: 1. A ministerial record of births, confirmations, communions, marriages, and burials in the congregation, together with a daily record of all clerical acts that he has performed; 2. a protocol of all the churchly proceedings of the congregation; 3. a copy-book of all the official letters that have been received or sent, which protocols are presented by the pastor and revised by the Synod.

4. It devolves upon every congregation belonging to the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America through the secretary for its trustees in conjunction with its parochial school teacher to keep the following protocols: 1. A protocol of proceedings touching all the congregation's outward economic affairs, which protocol is kept by the secretary; 2. a protocol of the school system, which protocol is kept by the school teacher under the direction of the pastor. These protocols are authorized by the pastor.

One sees immediately what possibilities these records present both for the local and the general historian. Just as the church records in Norway furnished valuable information to the emigrant at his departure and to the student of emigration to-day, so these records supply material for the history of the most important events in the life of the individual church member. Here are authentic records of his birth, of his baptism, of his religious schooling, of his confirmation, of his marriage, of his communions, and finally of his death and

[5] This body took the official name "The Synod for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America," and was generally referred to as "The Norwegian Synod," or even as "The Synod."

burial. His name may appear in these records in many connections — as a sponsor, or witness, or church official, or contributor. The records reflect the physical as well as the spiritual well-being of the members, for the pastor makes entries about visits in cases of illness. Furthermore, entries in the church records may often serve as focal points by which other events can be properly identified in point of time and place.[6]

It may not be amiss to illustrate by specific instances chosen at random how the church records are used by the historian. The Reverend H. Halvorsen in *Festskrift til den norske Synodes Jubilaeum 1853-1903* wishes, in chapter 2, to establish the date for the founding of the former Norwegian Synod. In the course of his researches he cites *Kirkelig Maanedstidende, Emigranten*, Spring Prairie "Ministerialbog," the congregational protocols of Koshkonong, a letter from the Reverend H. A. Stub referring to the congregational protocols at Muskego, a letter from the Reverend N. Brandt from the Rock River congregation, the *Protocol of the Synod* regarding the Pine Lake congregation, the Synodical *Report of 1878*, and the "Correspondence Protocol for the Superintendent." The latter document is repeatedly quoted by Halvorsen in the *Festskrift*. The Reverend J. A. Bergh in *Den norsk lutherske Kirkes Historie i Amerika*, on page 17, quotes the "Ministerialbog" of the Muskego congregation to describe the terrible rate of mortality at Muskego in 1843 and the early part of 1844. He quotes the same source to illustrate certain other ministerial functions that are interesting because they are the first performed in America according to the ritual of the church of Denmark and Norway. Dr. Knut Gjerset and Dr. Ludvig Hektoen, in a study of health conditions among the early Norwegians, draw upon Clausen's "Ministerialbog" at Muskego.[7]

6 A suggestive article on "Church Records in Migration Studies" by Dr. Joseph Schafer is published in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 10: 328-337 (March, 1927).

7 "Health Conditions and the Practice of Medicine among the Early Norwegian Settlers, 1825-1865," in Norwegian-American Historical Association, STUDIES AND RECORDS, 1: 1-59 (Minneapolis 1926).

Many of the church records have been destroyed by fire or have been lost, albeit a few of them are locked in vaults either at the church or at the parsonage. In one case a church was afire, and when the pastor arrived upon the scene, he wished to dash into the burning structure at the risk of his life to rescue the records. Some of the members held the venerable clergyman by main force, but he struggled with might and main until some others of his members, who knew the old pastor's solicitude for the valuable church records, appeared on the scene and triumphantly handed him the records that they had rescued before the fire had made very much headway. The pastor is said to have embraced the records and to have gone contentedly home muttering something to the effect that they could always restore the old church but they could never have restored the old records. Wisdom is only slowly acquired, however. The records referred to are still in imminent peril of fire, and no amount of persuasion has been able to convince the congregation that they ought to be placed in a fireproof repository for archives. Another congregation owns very valuable documents relating to certain early settlements, but these documents are not given even the ordinary protection of being deposited in a vault!

Even vaults fail to afford absolutely safe protection, as many unpleasant things can happen to the records in a vault, especially if they have not been properly cared for before being filed away. The best method of preserving these records is to deposit them in one of the recognized Norwegian-American historical collections, where they will receive expert care from trained attendants.

Beyond a certain stage these records are perforce of relatively little local value; in the hands of a trained historian, however, they can furnish important information on certain phases not only of local but also of general history. Since in the very nature of the case not every community is fortunate enough to have persons with this special training, and since those who are interested in the particular history covered in the records might never think of combing the fields for this material until they find it, it would be a great step forward if the communities would turn these records over to some

competent association or institution for safe keeping. The records would then be available not only to the communities whence they came but also to that special group of students who have the talents and the interests to put them to a greater use. In this way the history of the community would be read into the larger record of events, the local records being always at hand to reflect honor upon the home community when any searcher after historical facts arrives upon the scene. The privilege of being represented is jealously guarded in other realms; why not in the most lasting realm — the realm of history? Let these local records represent the communities at the centers where historical research is made, rather than lie idle, relatively useless, and almost wholly unknown.

We have only begun to write our history. After the more obvious topics of Norwegian-American historical research have been exhausted, a more detailed study will begin and it is against that day that we must prepare. Almost every year graduate students from Iowa University come to the Luther College Library in Decorah for research in some aspect of Scandinavian-American culture. The college library has also had visits from graduate students at the University of Minnesota and it supplies material to students far and wide through the mails. This is indicative of the widespread interest that is shown in the collections at Luther College. Probably similar use is being made of the records preserved in the official archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association at St. Olaf College, in Northfield, Minnesota, and in the manuscript division and library of the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Paul. With such excellent service to be had should not all who have materials at their disposal gladly relieve themselves of the responsibility of keeping this property, which really pertains to the Norwegian-Americans as a group, and turn it over to some institution that can preserve it properly and also put it to use?

A NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LANDNAMSMAN:[1] OLE S. GJERSET

By Knut Gjerset

Ole S. Gjerset was born at Gjerset in Romsdal, Norway, on June 2, 1828. From youth he exhibited marked qualities of leadership, coupled with high intellectual gifts, an impressive personality and great strength of character. With clearness of vision and a mind always open to new ideas he strove with zeal to promote intellectual and social progress, pursuing with energy and determination the aims which he sought to accomplish. In his dealings with others he was cheerful, kind and liberal minded, but upright and fearless. Viewing life and its relations in the light of imperative principles, he was governed in his conduct, not by tactics of expedience and compromise, but by qualities of character which have regard for truth and justice, and never fail to render full account to the moral law.

As a young man he attended the Molde School at Molde, Norway, showing unusual talents as a student, and after completing the prescribed courses he was appointed teacher and precentor for the district of Frena in Romsdal. Here he married Karen Marie Eidem, her parents' only child and sole heir to her patrimony Eidem, an ancient farmstead whose history fades into the gray antiquity of saga times. A local historian, H. Haukaas, says about it:

The farm *Eidem* (Old Norse, *Eidheimr*) is one of the oldest in the district of Frena. According to the records it once belonged to the royal estate of *Hustad* (*Hustadr*). In later times it became an estate for widows of the pastors of the Akrøi church. . . . To the royal estate Hustad belonged Malme, Dale (the home of Karen Marie Eidem's mother), Elnes, Haukaas (a family to which Karen Marie was somewhat closely related), Eidem, Stavik, and probably also Rødset, Valle and Reffshol. Those places were the original centers from which

[1] *Landnamsman* literally means a man who takes land or settles. The term is used in the sagas especially about those who first took land and settled in Iceland.

the whole district of Frena was populated. Between these centers the country was covered with forests in early time. According to a well established tradition also supported by other evidence, Eidem, Haukaas, and Elnes are the oldest places in the Elnesvaag district. Many persons well-known from the sagas lived here. At Haukaas lived, according to an old tradition, Hauk Haabrok, whom King Harald Haarfagre sent as messenger, or ambassador, to King Aethlstan of England. From the near-by chieftain seat of Tornes came Tora Skagesdotter, the queen of Haakon Jarl. Here also lived her father Skage Skoftesson, and probably also her brother Tiende-Skofte, who became *herse* in Bud (an old Viking naval station, not very far away). Bergljot, wife of the great chieftain Einar Tambarskjaelver, came from Tornes, and Svein Jarl was born there. Flint-heaps at Tornes and other places show that this district was settled very early. Booths for Viking ships, twenty-seven feet wide and ninety feet long, are found at Tornes, and the chief war beacon for the Frena district is found at Skutaas by the sea. It was used for the last time during the English blockade of the Norwegian coast in the war of 1808.[2]

After Ole S. Gjerset married Karen Marie and took possession of Eidem he resigned his position as teacher and devoted himself to husbandry and farming. It was his ambition to improve and enlarge his wife's patrimony, to make it a model estate in equipment, buildings, and method of tillage. New tracts of land were added to it, and laborers were hired who worked from year to year, constructing drainage ditches, clearing the land of stone, and bringing it under cultivation. Some gratuitous work was also rendered by the cotters and peasants who dwelt on small parcels of land belonging to the estate, for which, in lieu of rent, they were to render a certain amount of work gratuitously or for nominal pay, according to the custom still prevailing at that time. As the forests of the estate could yield sufficient pine timber for building purposes, Gjerset also undertook to erect new buildings, the most important being a large two-story dwelling house, which was in due time completed. The herds of sheep and cattle were also increased. Some welcomed the spirit of progress which thus began to manifest itself, but others shook their heads in

2 H. Haukaas to the writer, March 9, 1924.

doubt and misgiving. Why were new acres always added to the old, drainage ditches constructed, new buildings erected? Since Eidem was already a large farm, was it not pure pride and arrogance, not to say disregard for old traditions, to make all these unnecessary changes? Furthermore they had heard that changes might be expected also in other lines. Where would it end? The answer was difficult for those who pondered and shook their heads. Only one thing was clear; Eidem was no longer to sleep in poetic undisturbed repose. The wheels of progress had begun to turn in obedience to a new will, strong and positive.

In public life Gjerset held many positions of trust which consumed much of his own time. The laws of his country he had studied diligently, and was so well posted that he became the spokesman and leader of the people of the district in all matters pertaining to popular rights and public policy. Especially did he devote himself with energy to the promotion of the great issue of an improved system of public education. Before his day the instruction of children had been in the hands of itinerant teachers, not always well qualified for their calling, and the branches taught aimed at nothing more than to impart sufficient religious knowledge for confirmation in the Lutheran state church. Through untiring effort Gjerset succeeded in bringing about the establishment of permanent district schools with properly qualified teachers and with a curriculum of studies which aimed at a general public education. Upon a visit to Eidem in 1910 the writer of these lines walked along the chaussée toward a cluster of houses which he remembered, but which he had not seen since he left them on a May morning at the age of five and a half years. Now he had come to view once more the never fading scenes of childhood. The day was beautiful, the mountains majestic, strange, yet partly familiar. Vague memories of childhood arose like a distant fata morgana at every turn. There again was Eidem. How strange!

On passing the public school he stopped to speak to the teacher, who was in the garden. He was introduced, and when his name was mentioned, the teacher stared...." Gjerset! The son of Ole S. Gjerset?"

"Yes."

"Why, your father founded this school."

This and like bits of gratuitous information helped to fill the vague outlines of childhood memories with more tangible features of the past. He resumed his walk with new and thoughtful interest.

In his own home Gjerset always welcomed young people who came to receive from him without compensation instruction in singing and other useful branches. In him they found not only an able teacher who awakened in them love of knowledge and of careful and thorough intellectual work, but also a broadminded and fatherly companion who understood them and their little problems and sympathized with them. One of those who in this way had sought his help, a very intelligent man, Bjarte Hatlebak, who died recently at his home near Eidem at the age of eighty-six, says: "When Gjerset came to Eidem, I hired out to him in order that I might be near him and profit by his instruction. Whatever I possess of book-knowledge I have learned from him." We can probably say without contradiction that wise is the man who knows how to win the hearts of his fellow men. That Gjerset had done so is made evident in many ways. Upon reaching Berlin, Germany, after a visit to Eidem in 1910, the writer of these lines received a letter from a man living somewhere in the Frena district, in which he says: "I have heard that you have been at Eidem. If I had known that you were here, I would have come if it were ever so far, for I knew Ole S. Gjerset, and traditions about him are still told in these districts."

But progress was slow in Romsdal. The soil was poor and the climate unfavorable. Farming, husbandry, and the fisheries brought small returns, and as a family of children were gradually born to the owner of Eidem, he began to think of their future and what chances they might have to fight life's battles successfully where nature yielded her blessings in so scant a measure. The improvements made would scarcely increase the net income, and in spite of added acres and increased herds he found that for the children the future did not

look promising. For some time he had studied carefully the accounts of America, the land of opportunity with its salubrious climate and endless areas of rich soil which could be had for the asking. Would it not be better to seek a brighter future for the children in the new world? These thoughts gradually ripened in his mind into a firm resolve. He would do what others had done, leave friends and fatherland and seek his own and his childrens' fortune in the United States of America. Sad days now dawned upon the Eidem household. Friends of high station and low pleaded with him not to leave his fine home and the district that needed his services, but the die had been definitely cast. As Karen Marie was the only child, there was no one near of kin who could become the owner of Eidem. The estate had to be alienated from the family, sold to strangers, a special calamity in Norway, where estates are usually held in unbroken family ownership century after century, and are regarded as the basis of everything permanent and worth while in family life and tradition. But sentiment can have no voice in the hour of supreme necessity. Eidem was sold, the household goods disposed of under the auctioneer's hammer, and preparations were made for the great journey. On a May morning in 1871 wagons stopped before the door at Eidem. On these, chests and baggage were loaded; the family stood ready to depart. Only Karen Marie's old mother was to remain behind, as she considered herself too old to venture upon so hazardous a journey. If there is anything more bitter than death, grandmother Eidem must have experienced it that day, when she was to part forever from her only daughter and all her grandchildren. Aged and alone she was to return to the house, now empty — sold to strangers. For Karen Marie the cup of grief was no less bitter. Every step taken in the long preparation for the journey had been an agony; and now the day had finally come when the tenderest ties must be severed, when she must part from her mother, her friends and associates, her home and patrimony, to begin a long journey into unknown lands, where she must live a lonesome life among strangers. But the bitter cup had to be drained for the sake of the children who

accompanied her. If they have ever enjoyed any advantages, any good fortune in this new land, let them not forget the price at which it was purchased. With that as a commentary let them sit down and ponder again the old commandment: Honor thy father and thy mother. The wagons moved on, and Eidem disappeared from view.

In the little family group of emigrants was also Ole Eidem, Karen Marie's son of a former marriage, now nineteen years old, tall and handsome, gifted and well educated, charming in manners and conversation, always a great favorite. He was leaving his grandmother and a girl of his own age to whom he was engaged, but in the bitter moment of parting he was buoyed up by the imagination and hopefulness of youth. In a few years he could probably return to see again his grandmother and his fiancée. It was a fond hope which was never realized. He became in America a popular and successful merchant, but died in Watson, Minnesota, at the age of fifty-six, without ever visiting Norway again.

From Bergen, Norway, the family went by steamer to Hull in England, whence they proceeded overland by train to Liverpool. Here they embarked on the steamer "Peruvian" of the Allan Line, and reached Quebec, Canada, after a voyage of eleven days. Through Canada they traveled on the customary railway immigrant trains to Grand Haven on Lake Michigan, and crossed the lake in a steamer to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The journey was thus finished in as short a time and with as much comfort as circumstances in those days would allow immigrants. But the ride day after day through the forests of Canada in immigrant cars with hard wooden seats, coupled to long freight trains with little or no comforts or accommodations was very trying for Karen Marie, who was in delicate health and had a family of little children to care for. From Milwaukee they continued their journey by train to La Crosse on the Mississippi. But here Gjerset became seriously ill from the excessive heat and the humid and oppressive summer atmosphere of the Mississippi Valley, so unlike the cool mountain air of Norway, and the fresh breezes of the sea to which he had been accustomed.

After some weeks of illness and convalescence the journey was continued by steamer up the Mississippi to St. Paul and Minneapolis, and thence, on the Manitoba railroad, to Litchfield in Meeker County, Minnesota, where another stop had to be made. Upon diligent search Gjerset was able to find lodging for himself and his family in the log cabin of a Swedish settler, Tørnbom, in the woods at some distance from Litchfield, and here shortly after their arrival, his daughter Amalia was born. No medicines or medical aid could be had, and the comforts in that cabin were about the same as on Robinson Crusoe's island; but there was at least shelter, and the cheering presence of fellow human beings who were glad to render assistance to the extent of their ability, — important things when we return to life's fundamental elements. Karen Marie, who was rather diffident and timid in small matters, was always very brave when she was brought face to face with a real crisis, and never did she display greater courage than in those trying days in the Tørnbom cabin.

As soon as the days of danger and anxiety were over Gjerset set out alone upon a journey to find a suitable location for a home in this sparsely settled frontier region, going first by train to Benson, which was almost as far as the Manitoba railroad was yet built. From Benson he turned southward on foot across the prairies, and continued his march till he came to the Big Bend on the Chippewa River in Chippewa County, Minnesota. Nowhere, he thought, had he seen finer farm lands, and after careful deliberation he filed on a claim of eighty acres, according to the provisions of the homestead law at that time. When he returned to his family at Litchfield, he could tell them that he had now become the prospective owner of a fine tract of land in as beautiful a farming country as he had ever seen. He felt buoyed up by a new hope. If great sacrifices had been made, if trials had been endured, he felt that the future gave promise of rewards which were already beginning to appear.

Energetic preparations would now have to be made to build a home on the new land, and to put a part of it under cultivation. The purchase of a wagon, draft animals, and other

necessaries was, therefore, undertaken promptly. As horses were scarce and costly in this new country, he followed the custom of pioneer settlers and bought, beside a new wagon, a pair of steers of the usual Texas type, tall and bony, with immense spreading horns. There could be no doubt that they could pull even the breaking plow. Never before had he used such a wagon or such a team. Assisted by his oldest boy, Oluf, about twelve years of age, later lawyer and state senator in Chippewa County, he hitched up the steers to get a little practice. It was a fine June day, and things seemed to go well. Seated in the wagon he and Oluf drove along the road from Litchfield, where the purchase had been made, when suddenly the steers gave a start and launched into a wild runaway. Not even the swiftest horses could have excelled in speed these muscular giants of the prairies. The wagon and its contents were scarcely an impediment. On they rushed in mad panic as if fleeing from some invisible enemy, impelled by the primeval instinct of *sauve qui peut*. Oluf, the embryo state senator, clung as well as he could to his place in the wagon-box, but Gjerset himself, growing alarmed at the outlook, tried to jump from the wagon, and landed on his head in a clump of hazel bushes. But under the hot June sun even the giant steers could not long continue this violent exercise. They were soon so overheated and exhausted that they had to stop for breath. Their fear as well as their energy was gone, and they walked quietly the rest of the way to the Tørnbom cabin. The wagon, being new and strong, was not damaged, and as Gjerset and Oluf had escaped injury, no great harm had been done. Was it that the steers had acted in obedience to a sudden mischievous impulse, or did they only wish to take a little physical exercise of the kind they usually indulged in on the prairies? Who knows? But the performance was often repeated later, sometimes with more serious consequences to themselves.

When the journey could again be resumed after the stay at Litchfield, the Gjerset family went by train to Benson, while Ole Eidem and Oluf were to follow with the oxen, the wagon, and the greater part of the baggage. Benson at that time

consisted of a very simple wooden railway station and a few board houses, called stores, in which some enterprising young men were doing a little retail business. After some days Ole Eidem and Oluf arrived with the oxen and baggage, without having suffered any mishap, and the preparations were then begun for the last stage of the journey to Big Bend on the Chippewa River. Early one morning chests and baggage were loaded onto the wagon, the steers were hitched to it, Karen Marie and the children — Oluf, Gurianna, Søren, Knut, Magnus, and the infant sister Amalia — were placed as securely as possible on top of the load, and the march began over the prairies towards Big Bend, twenty miles away, Gjerset and Ole Eidem driving the steers. The prairie stretched as an unbroken plain to the horizon in all directions. No hills or trees greeted the eye, except along the Chippewa River, where there were small areas of timber. But there was something impressive in these vast stretches of level fertile soil, which seemed to offer such unusual opportunities. There was sunshine and song of birds, a luxuriant growth of grass and wild flowers. It was America, or their part of it, as they first learned to know it. The hope of home and rest finally beckoned the little group of weary immigrants, long since tired of watching the ever changing scenes. The steers trudged on patiently. Fortunately their old malicious mischief-making impulse did not seize them. What if they had run away? What would have become of Karen Marie and the infant Amalia, and the rest of the children, seated on top of the load? They would undoubtedly have been scattered along the prairie among the chests and baggage, and if alive how could they have reached Big Bend twenty miles away? But the steers behaved unusually well that day, as if conscious of a great responsibility. It was one of the few times they did not run away when hitched to a wagon. In the evening the Gjerset family reached Nils K. Hagen's log cabin in Big Bend, where they were received with open arms by Nils Hagen and his splendid wife, Kari. The comforts of home and the cheering friendship of sympathetic people had been found, and the Hagens invited the strangers to share the cabin

with them until they could build their own house on their claim near by.

Without delay Gjerset began to haul lumber from Benson for erecting a house, and this work was carried forward with such energy that the family could establish themselves in their own home before fall. Hay was cut for the oxen and cattle, and a few acres were broken so that a small crop could be raised the following year. More could not be accomplished the first season. Hagen warned Gjerset of the danger of prairie fires, and told him how to safeguard himself against it. A few furrows were broken around the house some rods apart, and the grass between these was burned. With the breaking to the north of the house and this protection on the other sides it was thought that ample precaution had been taken. But Karen Marie was troubled with an apprehensive dread of this new enemy. She would often take a chair and seat herself on the breaking with the children about her, in an effort to protect them against this mysterious danger which, she had been told, might sweep down upon them at any time, as soon as the grass withered in the fall. There was in her nature a strain of tender melancholy, probably due to dramatic experiences in her own life. What sacrifices had she not made? and how great the change for her and her family! But the children were good companions, as they kept her constantly occupied in waging a brave battle for their welfare and protection, and being by nature very active, she found little time to brood over losses or the changing whims of fortune. Even the dread of prairie fire kept the mind in a state of tension, and created a certain interest in life. One day in the fall a good breeze was blowing, and the sky was gray with a haze which resembled smoke. In the evening the sky was lit up with a lurid red illumination, and before long the whole horizon to the west and northwest seemed to be aflame. The prairie fire was coming. In the dry tall grass of sloughs and prairie, fanned by a good breeze, and with nothing to impede its progress, it traveled with incredible rapidity. The roar of the flames was heard like a rumble even at a great distance, and in the darkness of the night the surging ocean of fire might

strike terror into the stoutest heart. Karen Marie and the children were wailing in helpless fear. She pleaded that they should all retreat to the breaking, which would afford some protection; but Gjerset, who had never yet flinched in the face of danger, maintained that there was no cause for alarm, that all necessary precaution had been taken. Why should they flee? There was no time for long deliberation. On the fire came with a rush. Rags and pails of water were grabbed and the children were ordered to stay in the house. The critical moment had come. Karen Marie forgot her tears and heroically joined the little fire brigade which sallied forth to fight for the house. Quick as thought the fire was upon them, the wind carrying it with one mighty sweep across the furrows and the fire-break so that the flames enveloped all. But the danger was soon over. The fire-break had broken the solid front of the onrushing flames, and although they swept across it, they did not immediately gain any force on the other side, and Gjerset, Karen Marie, Ole Eidem, and Oluf, armed with wet rags, soon brought them under control. The house was safe, and the fire was already far beyond it, going towards the near-by Chippewa River, where it stopped. Behind lay the prairie, black as a mighty pall, dotted here and there with whitening buffalo bones.

As far as the eye could see there were no human habitations. The Indians had been moved away after the great massacre in Civil War times, but the settlements throughout this region, having made little progress since those trying days, were still small and scattered. A few log cabins were found along the Minnesota and Chippewa rivers, but Montevideo, which is now a city of over 4,000 people, consisted at that time of a mill run by water power from a river dam; and as the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad was not built till many years later, Benson in Swift County and Willmar in Kandiyohi County were the only markets for wide areas. But settlers soon began to pour into this new region, mostly Norwegians, coming either directly from Norway or from older settlements in Wisconsin, and in a few years all available homestead land

was taken. Many of the settlers had large families, and the population grew rapidly. Nikolai Hanson had six sons and three daughters; Gabriel Gabrielson, one son and six daughters; Morten Larson, two sons and six daughters; Nils K. Hagen had seven children, four sons and three daughters; Knut Johnson had thirteen children, most of whom were born in the settlement; to Ole S. Gjerset nine children were born, of whom one died in infancy in Norway. The three youngest, Amalia, Albert, and Carolina (Mrs. T. C. Wollan), were born in America. In large sections of Chippewa County the settlers were almost exclusively Norwegians. The same was the case also in the counties of Swift, Pope, Stevens, Kandiyohi, Renville, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle. In this fertile region was thus founded one of the greatest Norwegian settlements in America.

Ole Gjerset had not come to America in quest of an opportunity to make a living. His main purpose had been to enable his children to become more successful and prosperous under the stimulus of a more favorable economic environment, and he considered it necessary, therefore, to acquire so much land that farming could become an occupation of some importance. Early efforts during the first few years convinced him that the soil was fertile and would yield big returns, if it was properly tilled, and if no untoward circumstances hindered the growing of crops. Horses and farm machinery were purchased, and all the available land on the first eighty-acre homestead was put under tillage, another eighty acres being added after some years. As the large land grants of the Manitoba Railway extended through this region, every other section of land was owned by the railroad company, but this land was not placed on the market for sale till many years subsequent. Of this land Gjerset took possession of two quarter sections, with the expectation of purchasing them as soon as the company should offer them for sale. They were permanently added to the old homestead through purchase by one of the younger sons, Magnus, who later became the owner of the farm. The area of tillable land had thus been increased to 440 acres.

In 1873 the Timber Culture Act was passed by Congress for the purpose of reforesting treeless areas in the West. It provided that a man might secure title to a quarter section of the public lands by planting forty acres of timber, and proving a ten-year growth. These terms proved too difficult, and were later modified to ten acres in trees and an eight-year growth, but even then the terms were so difficult that only slight results were obtained. Gjerset filed early on a quarter section, according to the first provision of the law, and undertook the difficult task of planting and cultivating forty acres of timber. The ground had to be cultivated for some years to put it in a proper state of tillage. The trees were then planted, twelve feet apart, as the law provided, and were cultivated, pruned and cared for during the next ten years. The undertaking was successfully completed, the only one of the kind ever carried through according to the first provisions of the Timber Culture Act in all that great region. Gjerset became the owner of the quarter section, and forty acres of timber on the treeless prairie now stand as a unique monument to his industrious and intelligent efforts. The place was later bought by his son Oluf, practicing lawyer in Montevideo, Minnesota, who has added new tracts, increasing it to over 600 acres. After acquiring this new quarter section the area of tillable land in Gjerset's possession amounted to 640 acres.

If farming had been as profitable as the fertility of the soil seemed to promise, even this area would probably have been considerably increased. According to the old Norwegian view, well established from early ages, land possessed a certain dignity and worth, aside from its purely commercial value. It was the pride of the old chieftains; it insured economic well-being and personal independence; it gave stability and permanence to the family in whose possession it remained from century to century. This view of land as a family heritage which Gjerset had acquired from his fathers he also transmitted to his sons. Only two of them, Magnus, who became the owner of the old homestead, and Søren, who died young, engaged in farming as a vocation, but all of them became owners of farm lands, even of considerable areas. In all they

acquired title to not much less than 3000 acres. But it is worthy of note that this land was held largely for reasons of sentiment, in harmony with the old conception of landownership, rather than as a speculative venture. For long periods of years, during the ups and downs of prices this land was held, even when it might have been sold to good advantage from a business point of view, and in most cases these large tracts of good farm lands have been of little economic importance to the family.

Farming in the great Northwest in pioneer times was associated with many hardships due to lack of markets, fuel, roads, mills, and every comfort and convenience belonging to well-organized rural communities. But more grievous were the bitter disappointments wrought by unfavorable climatic conditions and other unforeseen ills. In this large, treeless inland region the climate in early days was unusually capricious and severe. In the winter there was usually a very heavy fall of snow accompanied by excessive cold and violent storms which often lasted for several days. It might then happen that pioneer farmers in trying to make their way with their teams of oxen through the snowdrifts and over the trackless prairies would perish in the terrible blizzards. In the summer there might be an excessive rainfall, or there might be great heat and prolonged drought. Often when early prospects were good, the harvest might be very meager, but if no destruction or damage was wrought, it might yield fine returns. In spite of difficulties real progress was made during the early years, and the pioneer farmers felt encouraged and hopeful.

But now that they were beginning to feel that they were successfully surmounting the difficulties of pioneer life, they were suddenly overwhelmed by the calamity wrought by the Rocky Mountain locusts which for years harried the Northwest, destroying the crops over large areas. In 1873 great damage was done in Nebraska, Iowa, southern Minnesota, and other places; but greater still was the havoc wrought the following year, when the young generation of insects, hatched from eggs laid in the ground, attacked the growing vegetation

early in the season. In many places the crops were wiped out, and the hardships of the farmers became so great that in southern Minnesota many abandoned their farms and moved away. In 1875 the destructive ravages continued. Energetic steps were taken both by the people themselves and by the local authorities to combat the evil, but the insects appeared in such numbers that nothing of real value could be accomplished. In July, 1875, a correspondent to the Norwegian-American weekly *Fædrelandet og Emigranten* writes: "On the 9th of this month the locusts flew over New Ulm in such numbers that they darkened the sun." Some counties offered bounties for destroying locusts, paying at the rate of one dollar a bushel for insects caught. In Shelby County, Minnesota, it was reported in 1875 that by July 8, 17,281 bushels of locusts had been caught. In Blue Earth County 20,000 bushels had been caught up to July 10 of the same year. But even these vast amounts did not perceptibly reduce the destructive insect hosts. As a measure for protecting the crops these efforts were utterly unavailing. In 1876 the locusts extended their invasion still farther northward in Minnesota, arriving in many new districts shortly before harvest, often totally destroying the crops. On July 11 of that year it was reported from Benson: "The locusts have harried this district for three days, and have done such damage that the prospects for a harvest are poor. The destruction has been wrought throughout a district starting six miles north of Benson, and extending fifty miles southward through the counties of Swift, Chippewa, Lacquiparle, and part of Stevens."[3] From other parts of the state like reports were received. An investigation conducted by the state government showed that in twelve counties, in an area a hundred miles wide and two hundred miles long, the crops had been severely damaged and in some places entirely destroyed, so that the average yield per acre would not be over eight or ten bushels.

On Gjerset's farm in Big Bend there was nothing to harvest in 1876. The fields were plowed at harvest time, and preparation was made to seed as big an area as possible the next

[3] *Fædrelandet og Emigranten*, July 20, 1876.

spring, in the hope that if there should be a good crop the losses sustained could be made good. But the spring of 1877 saw a new generation of hungry young locusts emerge from the ground, more numerous than that of the previous year. The green fields were soon eaten black. Everything planted was entirely destroyed. Even the grass was so eaten and corrupted that the cattle did not thrive. Again the fields had to be plowed at midsummer. When the locusts had grown to full size, they flew away, and this section of the country has never since been visited by this plague, but behind was left complete economic ruin. Most of the pioneer farmers had no reserve capital with which to operate. Once and in some places twice before, they had lost their crops. Now they were again to provide food, clothing, fuel, seed, and funds for running expenses for another year. For many the situation was very trying. So far as markets could be found, sheep and cattle were sold, even at the lowest prices, and the farms were mortgaged to obtain small loans at high rates of interest. In most cases the hopes of the pioneer farmers had been blasted, and their chance of economic success destroyed, as they were now plunged into a mire of mortgaged indebtedness from which, for a generation, they were not able to extricate themselves. Even after the locusts left, crops continued to be poor in many districts, as a new enemy, the rust, attacked the wheat, so that in many places grain farming never again yielded a profitable return. With the development of diversified farming, dairying, the planting of corn, and the raising of hogs and cattle, a new era of progress dawned for the farmers, but many of the early pioneers did not live to enjoy the new prosperity.

Ole S. Gjerset had brought some money with him from Norway, and had been able to make a good start in farming when the locust destruction came. But what capital he possessed was spent in the initial preparations, and he now had to share the economic hardships with the rest. The hope of better economic opportunities in the new world, for the realization of which he had sacrificed so much, had suddenly vanished, and life seemed to offer no better prospect than a persistent

struggle against misfortune. The winter storms swept over black plowed fields which for two years had yielded nothing. Herds of cattle, which could not be sold at any price, sought shelter from the chilling blast. All charm had disappeared from pioneer farming on the prairies of the great Northwest.

From Norway Ole S. Gjerset had also brought with him to America his intellectual interests and a large chest full of books. In a bookcase on the wall he placed these precious volumes of history, geography, sagas, travels, psychology, law, medicine, religion, language, music, and mathematics, which gradually became the center both of interest and activity in the home. The greater the disappointment in farming and economic life the more completely the minds of all the children turned to these intellectual possessions, which grew ever more precious under the hardships of the pioneer environment. When the winter evenings grew dark and stormy, and nature looked cheerless and forbidding, Gjerset gathered his children around the table, wood was put on the fire, the books were taken from the shelf, and most happy hours were spent in study and conversation. Every winter evening from seven o'clock till ten, and usually also in the day time, especially during the winter months, the home was a school, and Gjerset was a trained and inspiring teacher. A number of branches were studied: books of Christian doctrine, arithmetic, geography, history, grammar and composition, writing, and singing. The family was organized as a choir, and when blizzards blew, the songs resounded, making the evenings pleasant in the lamp-lit home. Gjerset had gathered a large collection of songs of various kinds, together with melodies, neatly written in a bound volume, and among the books of songs and music this soon became a family treasure.

Karen Marie did not attempt to instruct the children in secular branches, but was very insistent that they should learn well their books of Christian doctrine, and sometimes she would read the gospels with the younger children. The progress made by them in their studies became more and more her chief concern, and seemed to inspire her with new hope. One fall when the shadows of evening were falling after a

dreary October day, one of the younger boys was seated at her side learning his lessons. Suddenly she picked him up, put him in her lap, caressed him and stroked his hair saying: "You will be a student, and you will be very successful. But you must always keep away from that which is evil. Do not let anything that is wicked and wrong ever ruin your career." Karen Marie was quiet in her demeanor, and seldom gave expression to her emotions. The boy did not grasp the meaning of this rather unusual demonstration of affection, but he learned to understand it better later. It was a mother's determination to win in life's most important battle.

Experience showed that in spite of his interest in agricultural pursuits, and his large plans regarding farming Gjerset continued to be, as in his early years, preëminently a student. Never was he happier than when he could seat himself at his writing table, and give himself wholly to diligent and persistent intellectual work. All troubles were then forgotten, as he lived and moved with ease and freedom in the kingdom of his own mind. He had a fondness for mathematics, and prepared a text-book in geometry, which he considered chiefly as an intellectual pastime. He also took a keen interest in the various doctrinal controversies waged among Norwegian Lutherans in America in those days. When the controversy about predestination broke out, he joined the Anti-Missourians, and wrote extensively on this deep and obscure theological question, exhibiting great skill and ability as a dialectician. When one considers the ease and skill with which he wielded his able pen, the clearness and penetration of his mind, his scope of knowledge and remarkable grasp of a wide range of subjects, one can only regret that life did not vouchsafe him the opportunity to follow a student's career, for which his talents so preëminently fitted him.

During early years there were neither schools nor churches in the newly settled regions. The children and young people growing up in the pioneer settlements, suffering from the various disadvantages of pioneer life, found little opportunity to acquire even the most rudimentary education, and were in danger of becoming an intellectually stunted and ignorant

generation. Owing to the economic distress caused by the locust ravages the people in the stricken districts were not able to build schools or hire teachers. Little could be done to provide the much needed educational facilities. For years Gjerset taught school for the children of the settlement during the winter months for little or no remuneration as he still harbored the same keen interest in public education which characterized his early career. Part of the time was devoted to religious instruction, but the ordinary school branches were also taught. In the summer he often taught Sunday School in his own home, inviting the children of the neighborhood to come on Sunday afternoon, and devote the time to singing and the learning of lessons of various kinds. In his own busy life he took special delight in awakening intellectual interest among the young people, and if his efforts were successful, even in the smallest degree, he was happy and considered himself amply compensated. In church work he always took an active part. He was one of the organizers of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod congregation in the Big Bend settlement, served temporarily by the Reverend Lars Markhus of Norway Lake, Kandiyohi County, Minnesota, until the Reverend O. E. Solseth became permanent pastor in 1873.

When he grew old he sold the farm for a small sum to his son Magnus, and retired to Watson, Minnesota, where he spent his declining days with his daughter Amalia (Mrs. O. Erikson). Here he died on January 30, 1902. The funeral was conducted by his pastor, the Reverend Hjalmar S. Froiland, who began his sermon by saying: "A great man has departed from us. I knew Ole S. Gjerset well, and as he grew older my visits with him became frequent, but I never called on him to give him spiritual advice. I came to him to learn, to profit by his superior wisdom and insight." What greatness he possessed was not of wealth, power, or station in life, as he possessed none of these; it was rather of influence due to greatness of mind and strength of character.

THE ICELANDIC COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA: CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS AND EARLY SETTLEMENTS

By Thorstina Jackson

Very few countries have the good fortune to possess such detailed accounts of the dawn of their history as Iceland. Its discovery and settlement belong to the Viking Age, the golden age of the Norse countries. During that age the Norseman awoke to life, life that was energetic as well as stimulating, with two main issues, wealth and renown on the one side and death on the other. Individualism, adventure, and liberty, the watchwords of the Norse Vikings, led to a social system singularly well-organized and fundamentally democratic. The clarion call of the Vikings sounded in the Scandinavian countries, the British Isles, particularly Ireland, far-away Russia, and even along the distant shores of the Mediterranean. By the middle of the ninth century, many Norsemen had settled in Ireland, and had intermarried with the natives, though at the same time they kept up a close connection with the homeland. In time, the individualistic social order established by the Vikings lost ground in Norway. During the reign of King Harald Fairhair (860-933) autocracy was placed on a permanent basis, but many of the leading chieftains of his realm chose exile rather than to give up their cherished rights, and thus Norway lost many of its noblest and most enterprising families.

The path of these exiles can be traced through various parts of Europe. It was Iceland, however, the island on the rim of the Arctic circle, that chiefly attracted these wanderers; there they took root in virgin soil and formed social organizations of their own that culminated in the establishment of the first republic north of the Alps and the organization of the first of the world's parliaments in 930.

PERIOD OF COLONIZATION, 874-930

According to Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla, King Harald Fairhair demanded an oath of allegiance from his nobles, and those who refused to give it were forced into exile. The wealthy freemen were the ones who resisted the autocrat and so many from that class left the country that it appeared for awhile as if some of the districts of Norway would be depopulated. The main stream of Norwegian emigration was not to Iceland to begin with, but rather to Ireland, Scotland, and the near-by islands. There the emigrants were near enough to Norway to attack Harald's territory from time to time, but finally, as he grew too strong for these attacks, the exiles were forced to seek a permanent home. Their choice fell on Iceland, the "fair lady of the mountains." Many of the Norse settlers had dwelt for years in Ireland, Scotland, and elsewhere, and had intermarried with the natives, thus coming considerably under Celtic influence. Furthermore, the colonizers of Iceland brought with them numerous slaves, mostly victims of war and frequently as well born as their masters. These slaves were principally of Celtic origin. The Icelanders, therefore, are a fusion of the Norseman and the Celt, with a predominance of the former strain.

The Landnamabok (Book of Settlements) by Ari the Learned, recorded in the eleventh century, is unique in the world's literature. It contains names of over five thousand settlers and along with their genealogies are given numerous family traits and tendencies. Many Icelanders can still trace their descent back to the original settlers. The familes in the Landnamabok are chiefly of noble lineage. No doubt the names of chieftains and nobles were more faithfully retained in stories; nevertheless it is certain that it was above all the chieftains who attempted to escape the tyranny of Harald Fairhair. The ancient Icelandic sagas contain a number of Irish names such as Kormakur, the Irish Cormick, Kalman, the Irish Coleman, and Njal, the Irish Neal. It has been estimated that the Icelanders are possibly from fifteen to thirty-three per cent Celtic. The Icelandic sagas give many excellent descriptions of the settlers and their descendants. On the

whole, they agree with the descriptions of the Nordic race. Descriptions occur, however, of men with other features, dark or black hair, and low stature, indicating thus that the settlers of Iceland were by no means of unmixed race.

The ancient Icelanders were great worshipers of strength and feats of endurance and they seem to have recognized the value of cleanliness. In fact, they took pride in their appearance, as is customary with self-respecting men. As to manly vigor, the following description from Njalssaga of Gunnar of Lythend is a good example:

> He can cut, or thrust, or shoot, if he choose, as well with his left, as with his right hand; and when he smites with his sword he smites so swiftly that three swords seem to flash through the air at the same instant. Of all men he is the best bowsman; he never missed a shot. He can leap more than his own height, dressed in all his war gear, and as far backwards as forwards. He can swim like a seal.

The Norseman's philosophy was stern, but singularly just according to the code of the times. It taught a man not to give way before an enemy, to fight to the death, and to die like a man when the hour of death had struck. It was good to live if one fought bravely, and equally good to die if one fell on the field of battle fighting like a hero. To break one's pledged word was the lowest infamy; troth-breakers were the scum of the earth.

The Icelandic nation was founded on a revolt and a desire to break all former ties. When the Norwegian chieftain left the home that had been in his family for generations, he took with him the High Seat posts from his ancestral hall as a sign that he severed all bonds with his native land. These High Seat posts, richly carved, bearing symbolic pictures of the favorite deities of the family, were sacred to the Norseman. When the exiled Norwegian sighted the land of his choice, he threw the High Seat posts overboard and their drifting ashore determined the location of his home. Then the chieftain built anew his ancestral hall and raised a High Seat with the posts on either side. Icelandic pioneering had in it all the elements of daring and difficulty that characterize such a movement elsewhere. It is significant that in spite of the fact that many

of the colonizers were titled lords of noble birth, yet Iceland had only one class; the noble lord became a simple farmer or *bondi*. Naturally, there was a great deal of difference in wealth, and the leading chieftains lived in much the same royal state to which they had been accustomed in Norway.

THE ICELANDIC REPUBLIC, 930-1262

The Icelandic republic was a noble experiment in democracy. While mighty races such as the French, German, and Italian were still disunited and England lay bleeding under foreign invasions, not as yet comprehending the term national patriotism, all Iceland met with similar interests under a representative government functioning through the *Althing* (parliament). There the spirit of the Vikings was enchained by law. There, as in ancient Greece, each freeborn citizen was versed in the law of the land in order directly to participate in the business of government. The high-water mark of this period was from 930 to 1030, for then internal well-being and progress were at their height and the Icelanders gained a reputation for themselves as discoverers of Greenland and Vinland and won renown in the service of the earls and kings of Scandinavia and England, even penetrating as far as Russia and Constantinople.

The most important political achievement of the Icelandic commonwealth was the organization of the *Althing*, composed of *Logretta*, which consisted of five courts, one from each of the four divisions of Iceland and one Supreme Court. In addition there was the folk meeting to which all the taxpayers might come, and the Speaker of the Law, whose duties were to announce and interpret to the people the legislation of the *Logretta*.

Ulfljotur, the Solon of Iceland, based his laws on the ancient laws of the Norsemen, also receiving a strong influence from the laws and customs of the Anglo-Saxons. Ulfljotur spent three years in Norway perfecting the laws, and while he was there his brother Grim scoured the whole country in order to select a suitable place for the Assembly. He finally chose one where the elements and characteristics of Icelandic nature

seemed to meet and form a fitting combination. The spot of his choice was named *Thingvellir* (Parliament-plains).

The *Althing* was not only an important government function, but had its social importance as well. It convened on any day between the eighteenth and twenty-fourth of June and was in session two weeks. The Speaker of the Law and the priests had to be there, and every ninth farmer was obliged to accompany his priest to the *Althing*. In general every free-born citizen preferred to ride to the *Althing*; this was natural, because every freeman might be called upon to take part in public affairs and besides, many matters came up that concerned whole districts. Thus attendance at the *Althing* took the place of the modern newspapers, telephone, and telegraph.

At the *Althing* the national life expressed itself in its most complete form; on one side the serious business of life through legislation, trials of cases, and verdicts; on the other, unbounded vitality and pure joy of living that manifested itself in sports, courtship, narration of adventures, singing of the skalds, and the like. There gathered the flower of the Icelandic republic.

Internal strife and dissension were responsible for the loss of Icelandic independence and the country became a dependency, first of Norway in 1262, and then of Denmark in 1377. Then followed centuries of retrogression; devastating pestilences ravaged the country. The population, which at the time of settlement was approximately seventy thousand, fell at one time as low as fifty thousand. Instead of sailing the seas in their own ships, the Icelanders were reduced to great suffering through a foreign trade monopoly. Volcanic eruptions and polar ice added to the general misery. The nation suffered intensely through isolation, though this very isolation saved it from the abuses of King and Church that sapped the vitality of many of the other countries of Europe.

The beginning of the nineteenth century brought the romantic movement to Iceland; a spirit of intense patriotism was aroused and the leaders in the movement exhorted the people to recreate the days of their heroic past. The liberal movement found a leader in Jon Sigurdson, the George Washington

of the Icelanders. Largely through his efforts and those of another gifted leader, Benidikt Sveinsson, Iceland in 1874 received from Denmark a new constitution which insured home rule and free trade. The beginning of the twentieth century broke the barrier of isolation by connecting the country with the rest of the world by a cable and establishing a network of telegraph and telephone lines throughout the island. Almost simultaneously, the Icelanders acquired their own steamship line, something that saved them from dire straits during the World War. All these advances convinced the nation that it could manage its own affairs, and on December 1, 1918, Iceland received its autonomy from Denmark and it is now an independent kingdom, with the governmental powers vested in the *Althing*, which is presided over by a premier. Iceland maintains a fraternal union with Denmark through the person of the Danish king, who is also king of Iceland.

ICELANDIC LITERATURE

Viewed from the standpoint of numbers, never exceeding a hundred thousand, the Icelanders may be considered as a well endowed family that owes its existence to the intermingling of two strong races. In spite of great disadvantages, they have endured for a thousand years, without markedly losing that strong stamina to which the race owes its origin. The underlying reason for the endurance of the nation lies in the fact that the people have never ceased to be creative; when times have been the darkest, creative work has been their chief solace and relief. This creative faculty has expressed itself particularly in literature.

The political achievements connected with the establishment of the republic were followed by a literary epoch that has earned for Iceland the title of the "Greece of the North." While not masters of the technique of writing during their heroic age, the ancient Icelanders, like the Hebrew prophets and the Greeks of Homer's time, had a mastery of oral composition. This composition was reduced to writing in the sagas and eddas before 1300, thus preserving for the world

the mythology and heroic exploits of the North and giving permanent form to the ancient Norse language. The influence of the Celt upon the Norseman is felt in this literature; indeed, the poetic imagination of the Celt and the perseverance and balance of the Norseman blended well together and produced the Icelandic historian.

No nation has so persistently worshiped its classics as the Icelanders; the scholar deciphering a mouldy manuscript, the farmer at his homely tasks, the shepherd boy with his long-fleeced flock, and the dairymaid with her cumbersome churn, all alike have made the literature of their country a part of their being and conversed in the language of the eddas, pure and free from dialect.

This unique devotion to the ancient Icelandic literature, combined with the fact that the Icelanders have never ceased to produce, has preserved for a thousand years the unity of Icelandic literature; thus a child in present day Iceland can read the classic Njala or the poems of Egil Skallagrimsson composed in the early tenth century, with practically the same ease as the daily papers. From the days of the Icelandic republic a thousand years ago to the present, Iceland has an unbroken chain of literature that has stood the test of time. The chief reason why Icelandic literature since 1400 has not received a renown equal to that of the classics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries arises from the fact that the eddas and sagas stood alone as masterly productions in a native tongue in North Europe, but after the beginning of the modern age, the neighboring countries acquired literatures of their own and attention was diverted from that of Iceland.

The writers of the sagas, such as Ari Thorgilsson and Snorri Sturluson, were learned men of cultivated minds, but apart from the classical literature of Iceland, ancient and modern, there is a mass of folklore, colored by the imagination of a poetically inclined race, mirroring each period of Iceland's thousand years, supersensitive to all movements in the country. From this folklore sprang the tales of trolls, elfs, ghosts, goblins, and monsters, told during the dusky winter days and evenings in the *badstofas* of the Icelandic homes.

The centuries following the ancient literature were rich in religious works. The translation of the Bible in 1584 by Bishop Gudbrandur Thorlaksson ushered in a series of literary productions such as passion hymns of Hallgrimur Petursson, which place him in the front rank of the world's hymn writers, and the sermons of Bishop Jon Vidalin (1666-1720). These two books made their entry into every Icelandic home and their style and content lived on the lips of the people. The year books of Jon Espolin (1769-1836) published in twelve volumes, covering the period from 1262 to 1832, are a storehouse of historical data and also show exceptional ability in collating facts.

During the nineteenth century some twenty Icelandic authors have had their works translated into various European languages. Probably the only reason why poets such as Matthias Jochumsson and Einar Benidktsson are not world-renowned is that they have written in the language of Thor and Odin, the native tongue of less than a hundred thousand people. Modern Icelandic poets are cosmopolitans, who, while fully appreciative of their racial inheritance and the scenic grandeur of their country, do not overlook the literary gems of other nations, which they translate into their own language, not infrequently in a masterly way.

In the thousand years of Iceland's existence the nation has given unsparingly of its strength and devotion to literature. The authors of Iceland have never been confined to the academically trained class; thus the Icelandic *bondi* has contributed much that is best in Icelandic literature. In fact, the best Icelandic prose is that which is closest to the everyday diction of the farmers. With increased facilities for publication, many from the humblest circumstances are coming to the foreground with literary works of recognized merit.

The greatest factor in the spread of Icelandic culture has been the *badstofa* or living room in the country home. There one finds the pulse of the life of the people. In it during the gloomy winter afternoons and evenings the family assembles. Each person has a certain appointed task; the women spin, knit, sew, and weave, while the men card wool, make and

mend tools, and so forth. One person has a seat of honor underneath the light. He is the reader of the household; he reads the eddas and sagas aloud, as well as a great variety of modern books, both native and foreign. He frequently has a reading knowledge of one or more foreign languages, for the nature of the Icelandic language is such that it is easy for the Icelanders to acquire certain other languages. Thus the reader often translates at sight from some Scandinavian language, English, or German. Sometimes the entertainer sings one of the numerous ballads of the country and the audience joins in the refrain, the women working their spinning wheels in time to the tune. Now and then the reader drops his book and simultaneously there arises a discussion of its subject matter and many and varied are the opinions expressed in this oral analysis. The Icelander dearly loves an argument; he is Irish enough for that. It is in the *badstofa* that Icelandic children receive their most effective instruction in the classics of their country and it is rare to find a farmer boy who has not read the sagas and eddas by the age of twelve. The many hours of reading in the home have their effect on the language of the children, which is singularly free from slang.

ICELANDIC ART

Art has not been a medium of expression among the Icelanders to such a marked extent as literature. Ever since the carved High Seat posts determined the Norseman's choice of a home, wood carving has been an element in Icelandic life, however. Sometimes this art has been in danger of dying out, but then something has revived it, and to-day wood and bone carving is increasingly expressive of the creative impulse of the people. The paternal ancestors of the great sculptor Albert Thorwaldsen were natives of the North of Iceland; and to-day, Einar Jonsson, the poet-sculptor, has made a unique place for himself in the world of art. The art of painting is as yet in its infancy in Iceland, but it is receiving increasing attention.

ICELANDIC EMIGRATION

The third quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of unrest in Iceland; national consciousness that had been dormant for such a long time began to assert itself and leaders like Jon Sigurdson were striving to attain increased political liberties. While the liberal movement was slowly advancing, many became impatient with the slow progress, and that feeling was intensified by hardships caused by the polar ice that lay off the northern coast year after year. Reports of a land beyond the seas, the Vinland of the Icelandic sagas, began to penetrate to different parts of the country, and the possibilities of improving one's position through emigration were discussed.

The first direct emigration was to far-away Utah in 1855; some Icelanders in Copenhagen were converted by Mormon missionaries and induced a few relatives and friends to emigrate. These formed a small community near Spanish Fork. This emigration made, however, not a general but merely a local appeal. Icelandic emigration proper dates from 1870, in which year a small community was organized on Washington Island at the northwestern extremity of Lake Michigan. The small group of settlers came to America at the instigation of Danish friends, who encouraged them to try their fortune in the new land. The following extract from a letter dated Washington Island, March 8, 1872, gives an idea of conditions:[1]

I have been four days out on the ice fishing and have caught fifty fish, so far, and have sold them for nearly seven dollars; people come here to buy the fish and take it to nearby places; it sells at four cents a pound. There are many fishermen here from the communities around; they live in small cabins during the fishing season, and leave when the ice shows signs of breaking. When several days pass without anyone coming to buy, they put their fish side by side; no one takes from another a single fish; some days one catches thirty, others none.

Another under the same date describes his bill of fare thus:

One is unaccustomed to live on pancakes, syrup, pork and beans, as well as wheat bread and from twelve to fourteen cups of coffee each day, because here in America it is customary to

[1] This and the following letter are found in Thorleifur Joakimsson Jackson, *Fra Austri til Vesturs*, 7–8 (Winnipeg, 1921).

fill the cup each time it becomes empty, during the course of a meal, and those who have a tendency to be thirsty can drink a goodly number of cups. Some have five meals a day; particularly Germans and Norwegians.

This locality is very suitable to those who are entirely dependent on their own earnings; there is plenty to be had by cultivation of the soil and fish from the lake.

Numerous letters received from Washington Island caused a great deal of interest in Icelandic emigration. Gudmundur Thorgrimson, a merchant at Eyrarbakka on the south coast, had much faith in America and felt that it was the land of opportunity for enterprising young men. He persuaded two of his nephews, Haraldur and Pall Thorlaksson, to try their fortune in America and they in turn persuaded others. Thirteen Icelandic emigrants left in 1872 and their first abode was Milwaukee, Wisconsin. One of the group, Jon Halldorsson, describes their initial American experiences thus in a letter written at Milwaukee on September 8, 1872:[2]

We landed on the twenty-second of July in Castle Garden, New York, and found ourselves in a huge building, accommodating thousands of people. We spent the night there. We had to buy our food, but room on the floor and on benches in the building was free. . . . We arrived in Milwaukee at nine in the evening; the city was in darkness, because the street lamps had not been lit. . . .

I am never lonesome, have plenty to do in my spare time. Ten hours' work a day does not seem much to one who is accustomed to work sixteen. This is the country for unmarried men, who have no special ties, or young married ones with one child. . . . Six of us Icelanders have started a coöperative household, now a week old. The rent for three rooms is five dollars a month. We each contributed seven dollars and bought a stove, beds, chairs, table, and dishes. It is surprising how much we could buy for that amount of money. We bought our things and moved in after five o'clock last Saturday.

Pall Thorlaksson, while a student at Concordia University, St. Louis, wrote the following on January 27, 1873:[3]

No one lives here in idleness. If some think this country condones laziness, they had better not come hither. . . . In all probability it is best for Icelanders not to begin at once to be in business of their own, but learn from those who have

2 Jackson, *Fra Austri til Vesturs*, 13.
3 Jackson, *Fra Austri til Vesturs*, 19.

experience first. . . . It does not seem unlikely that, if we Icelanders form a settlement here, we may in time gain goods and renown. . . . I hope that the Icelanders who come here will be able to preserve their language through contacts with the motherland and newspapers and church organizations, such as are to be found among the Norwegians. Thus Icelandic authors may find a broader field for their endeavors.

These letters were not without their effect in Iceland; the numerous ones sent by Páll Thorlaksson show a balanced judgment, an eye for the opportunities of the new land, as well as a realization of the difficulties and trials that surround the adjustment to a strange environment. Iceland at the time was undeveloped compared with other countries, but withal there were no extremes of poverty or wealth. On the whole, the Icelanders were poor when emigration began, but thrifty, industrious, and free from the abject poverty of industrial centers. The nation was on a high level educationally and illiteracy was practically unknown. In the early seventies young people in Iceland began to dream of untold possibilities in a new land of opportunity and the emigration movement gained force with great rapidity. Hundreds left the homeland yearly, and it seemed for a while as if certain districts on the northern and eastern coasts would become deserted. However, increased material prosperity in Iceland checked the emigration movement in the late nineties.

The year 1875 is a significant one in Icelandic-American immigration, for then were established two of the important settlements, the Minnesota settlement in Lyon and Lincoln counties and "New Iceland" on the shores of Lake Winnipeg.

THE MINNESOTA SETTLEMENT

Most of the pioneers in the Minnesota settlement had come to America in 1873 or 1874, and had "hired out" with farmers in Iowa and Wisconsin. The first settler was Gunnlaugur Pétursson, who set out with his family from Iowa County, Wisconsin, to find a suitable homestead in the West. In a lumber wagon drawn by a team of oxen, he covered a distance of five hundred miles until he came to a halt on the banks of the Yellow Medicine River near the present town of Minneota.

There, on July 4, 1875, he pitched his tent and decided to settle. At present there are a thousand people of Icelandic extraction in the Minneota community. The colonists were fortunate in their choice of locality; the rich soil has yielded excellent returns in wheat and other kinds of grain.

Since early pioneers in Minneota were too poor to buy lumber for their homes and there were no trees available for erecting log cabins, they were obliged to live in cellars, dug deep into the ground and crudely thatched.

"NEW ICELAND," THE FIRST PERMANENT CANADIAN SETTLEMENT

In August, 1873, 165 Icelanders landed in Quebec. These immigrants divided into two groups, one going to Milwaukee and the other to Kinmount, Ontario, where the settlers had been promised work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. The following summer three hundred more joined their countrymen at Kinmount. A number of these immigrants went to Nova Scotia and took up homesteads in a very barren, hilly region, but no permanent settlement was formed there.

In the spring of 1875, the Canadian government, through the mediation of a young Icelander, Sigtriggur Jonasson, and a Canadian, John Taylor, offered the colonists the means of sending two men to investigate the possibilities of a permanent settlement in Manitoba. The two chosen, Sigtriggur Jonasson and Einar Jonasson, joined by three others, setting out from Ontario, traveled by rail to Moorhead, Minnesota, and thence by a Red River boat to the little town of Winnipeg, where they arrived on July 18, 1875. They found Winnipeg a little village without railroads, although work was being done on the Canadian Pacific east of the Great Lakes. The outlook in Manitoba was not pleasant at the time owing to a grasshopper plague.

There was no land available near Winnipeg for a separate Icelandic colony; and, as the immigrants were too poor to buy implements, horses, and oxen, it was not deemed wise to depend upon cultivation of the soil at first, but rather to choose a locality where there was some fishing to help out. Everything considered, the Lake Winnipeg region, some sixty miles from Winnipeg, seemed the most suitable. The settlers

could get fish from the lake and an abundance of timber for building purposes.

The first Icelandic colonists, 250 men, women, and children, came to Winnipeg in October of 1875. The immigrants had an abundance of hope, but were absolutely without funds. The Canadian government issued them a loan to buy food. After a few days sojourn in Winnipeg, the settlers started for the Land of Promise in six flat-bottomed boats, tied together in groups of three. These they floated down the Red River and they had reason to consider the "links of its long red chain" anything but a smooth road. When the flotilla arrived at Lake Winnipeg, it was met by a Hudson's Bay Company boat that towed it to its destination. The day of arrival was what is known in the Icelandic calendar as the last day of summer. No time was lost in putting up shelters, for the winter was near. In the whole colony there was only one domestic animal, a mongrel pup given to one of the children in Winnipeg. In a short time a group of cabins had been built and the pioneers elected five town councilors and named the village Gimli, or Paradise.

The first winter in the settlement was a terrible chapter in the history of Icelandic colonization in America. There was no milk to be had; there was no fishing because the lake froze, and food hauled so far was expensive: ninety-six pounds of flour cost $3.75; potatoes were ninety cents a bushel; pork sixteen to eighteen cents a pound; and coal oil cost sixty cents a gallon. Owing to inadequate food several of the settlers contracted scurvy and other diseases. It is estimated that almost one-third of the settlers died. The coming of spring awakened hope in the hearts of the colonists. The difficulty of getting food was eased, and the acquisition of a herd of twenty cows furnished the settlers with milk. The outlook was brightened by the arrival of twelve hundred colonists from Iceland, who took up homesteads and built a highway from one end of the settlement to the other.

In the fall of 1876, however, the colony received a tragic setback. A smallpox epidemic, carried to the colony from a near-by Indian reservation, broke out. The character of the

disease was not at first recognized, and the plague had ample chance to spread. It had gained the upper hand when doctors arrived from Winnipeg. The whole settlement was placed under a quarantine, which was not lifted until July first of the following year. More than a hundred settlers died of the disease and a much larger number were taken ill; all advancement was at a standstill; and the immigrants would have perished if the Canadian government had not generously continued to lend money for foodstuffs.

The young Icelandic minister, the Reverend Jon Bjarnason, for many years president of the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, came to the settlement from the United States in 1877 and became the minister of the colonists.

The Canadian Gimli had the honor of entertaining the Governor-General of Canada, the Marquis of Dufferin, on September 14, 1877. Ever since Dufferin's visit to Iceland in 1856 he had been a staunch admirer of the Icelandic people and of their language and literature. It was through his recommendation that the Canadian government was so generous in lending money to the immigrants. The settlers entertained their honored guest to the best of their ability; he visited every house in the little village of Gimli and went to three of the neighboring farms. He is reported to have remarked that although the pioneer homes were lowly and scantily furnished, every house had a considerable library, including religious books and the eddas and sagas brought from Iceland.

Gimli is now a favorite lake resort and during the summer months the Canadian Pacific trains thunder in many times a day. Very few of the earliest settlers remained permanently in the colony; in fact, the Gimli settlement is the mother colony of several other Icelandic communities, notably in North Dakota and southern Manitoba around Glenbero. Up to the beginning of the century, however, there was a steady flow of immigrants from Iceland to the Gimli district.

It is fitting that the Icelanders have erected an Old Folks' Home at Gimli, well equipped in every way and supported by the various Icelandic communities.

THE NORTH DAKOTA SETTLEMENT

The first Icelander to consider the part of Dakota bordering on the Red River as a feasible place for settlement was the Reverend Páll Thorlaksson. He had come from Iceland in 1872, and while studying in St. Louis and elsewhere had done field work in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and had profited by the opportunity to observe the progressive farmers in these states. In 1877 he went to "New Iceland" and became pastor in the Manitoba colony. The more he saw of the struggle of his countrymen in "New Iceland" the more convinced he became that the colonists would fare better elsewhere, particularly in the United States. His views gained popularity; and in April, 1878, he and two others set out to choose a suitable locality. They finally selected Pembina County, North Dakota; the abundance of timber in the district could furnish the settlers with material for building houses and also provide cord-wood and enable the colonists to gain a livelihood until the soil should yield its crops.

In the summer of 1878 immigrants began to arrive from "New Iceland"; the first log cabin in the settlement was ready for occupancy on June 23, 1878. The colonists from "New Iceland" were joined by groups of Icelanders from Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The daily life of the settlers during the first years was one of continuous hard work, for which they felt amply repaid if they got bare necessities in return. Potatoes formed the chief food during the first winter, and there was a limited amount of wheat bread and milk. The people had scarcely any meat save that which they managed to get from the Indians.

The Reverend F. J. Bergman, who has written some masterly sketches about Icelandic pioneer life, describes the first homes thus:[4]

> There were no handsome pieces of furniture in the pioneer's home. Four walls of logs, something put into the crevices between the logs to keep out the draft. . . . Two windows, one at the end opposite the door and the other on the side. . . . In one corner was the bed, in front of it the table, generally under

[4] Thorstina Jackson, *Saga Islendinga i Nordur-Dakota*, 139–140 (Winnipeg, 1926).

the side window; those who had the wherewithal covered the table with oil cloth and the housewife tried usually to get new oil cloth before Christmas, then everything took on such a festive air that she felt as if she were in a new house. The cabin boasted one chair, as a rule, but in general it was somewhat shaky, thus those who sat on it had to exercise the greatest care to avoid disaster. The painted wooden boxes from Iceland were much safer resting places and they stood in array against the walls. In them had been transported the articles that were the cherished personal possessions of the immigrants; there they were, gaily gleaming in bright red or green. Sometimes the owner's initials were on them in contrasting colors. They were the favorite seats, but even they showed signs of weakness, not so much because of the long journey from Iceland — they stood it pretty well — but rather because of the daily motion to the table and back again to the wall, both at meal time and on the frequent occasions when coffee was served. . . . The stove was placed against the windowless wall, but drawn out on the floor in the winter time, for then it had to fulfill a twofold purpose, cook the food and keep the family warm. . . . Sometimes on the wall was a place for the clock, that is to say in the homes that had a clock; a good many did not possess one and they had to study the course of the heavenly bodies as had been the custom of their ancestors when they sailed the seas. It was remarked that in many cases those who did not have a clock rose earlier; thus it was a gain rather than otherwise not to have a timepiece.

North Dakota is now the chief Icelandic settlement in the United States and the mother colony of five other Icelandic communities in the United States and Canada. At first, every homestead was occupied, but as time went on the farmers wanted more land, and those who were able bought out their neighbors, who in turn migrated to other districts.

COMMUNITIES ON THE PACIFIC COAST

There are about two thousand Icelanders on the Pacific coast, chiefly in Seattle, Blaine, Bellingham, Vancouver, Los Angeles, and San Diego. A few isolated settlers came to the Pacific coast in the seventies and eighties but the majority came between 1900 and 1905.

The Icelandic colonies in America have now passed the half-century mark; there has been no recent immigration from Iceland. It is not possible to estimate the exact number of

Icelanders in America, but counting all those of Icelandic extraction, it is safe to say that there are between thirty and forty thousand.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

During the fifty odd years that the Icelanders have been in America there have come into being among them many and varied organizations both religious and secular. Though the settlements are far apart they are united by the common bond of language and religion. The Icelandic Lutheran Synod, organized in 1884, is the most influential social agency among the Icelanders. It has congregations in all the settlements and has published many books on various subjects. The Synod supports an Icelandic Lutheran Junior College in Winnipeg and maintains the Old Folks' Home at Gimli. The Unitarian Church drew a number of adherents from among the Icelanders and lately they have united with the modernist faction among the Lutherans and are known as the Icelandic Confederated Church. Circulating libraries were organized in the early years of the settlements and have proved to be an important educational factor. Debating societies and community clubs are also quite common. There are two secular newspapers published in Winnipeg, *Logberg* and *Heimskringla*, and also a monthly publication, *Sameiningin*, maintained by the Icelandic Lutheran Synod. In 1917 the Icelanders organized a Patriotic League, to preserve the best in the Icelandic inheritance, such as the language and literature, and to gain a wider recognition of its importance in the world of culture. This league has branches in the principal Icelandic communities and publishes annually a very creditable magazine.

These organizations have tended to isolate the people, a thing perhaps not desirable on the surface, but beneficial in the long run. The immigrant children brought up under strong home influences, enjoying a varied community life, have sought higher education in greater numbers and are now holding more responsible positions than those who were reared in communities where the Icelanders were too few to have effective organizations of their own. Observation of

the various colonies leads to the belief that the strong Icelandic community life has been the greatest blessing for the settlers themselves, and also a means of inculcating in their children the best precepts of the motherland. Individuals and organizations are gradually losing their distinctive Icelandic identity but that does not mean that the efforts that the pioneers made to preserve their religion, language, and culture, have failed, but merely that the Icelandic inheritance is being gradually woven into the multi-colored fabric of American life.

ICELANDERS IN CERTAIN SPECIALIZED FIELDS

In proportion to their number, the Icelanders have taken an active part in public affairs. In both the United States and Canada they are pretty equally divided among the various political parties. In Manitoba Thomas H. Johnson was minister of public works for the Province and later Attorney General. In the late nineties and first decade of this century Magnus Brynjolfsson and Daniel Laxdal filled important public offices. Brynjolfsson was state attorney for Pembina County from 1898 to 1910 and Laxdal in addition to practising law was state superintendent of public lands. Gudmundur S. Grimson won national attention by his handling of the Martin Tabert case in Florida and is now a district judge in North Dakota. Sveinbjorn Johnson was for several years associate judge of the North Dakota supreme court and is now legal adviser for the University of Illinois. Hjalmar Bergman is a distinguished Canadian lawyer and has been appointed King's Counsel. Gunnar Bjornson has been a member of the Minnesota legislature and for many years has taken an active part in public affairs. In 1924 he was a Republican candidate for Congress and although not elected, he had a very creditable following. He is the owner and editor of the *Minneota Mascot*, a prominent Republican paper. At present he is a member of the Minnesota Tax Commission. Arni B. Gislason has been a district judge in Minnesota and his brother Jon Gislason has been active in state politics for a long time. A third brother, Haldor, follows an academic career and is a professor

at the University of Minnesota. Dr. B. J. Brandson is chief surgeon of the Winnipeg General Hospital; and his former partner, Dr. O. B. Bjornson, is a well-known authority on obstetrics. Dr. G. J. Gislason of Grand Forks is president of the medical association of his district and is a noted specialist in eye, ear, nose, and throat diseases.

A number of Icelanders in America have received signal academic honors. Among these are Skuli Johnson and Joseph Thorson, who were given Rhodes scholarships in 1909. The former is now Professor of Classics at the University of Manitoba, and the latter, a lawyer by profession, is a member of the Dominion Parliament.

Stephan G. Stephansson, a pioneer in three Icelandic settlements, has published four large volumes of poetry, in which he describes Iceland and American pioneer life in vigorous Icelandic. He also delves deep into sociological and moral problems. He has been characterized as the Icelandic-American Browning.

The Icelandic community in North Dakota has had its annals enriched for half a century by the impish, satirical humor of Kristjan Julius, who writes under the pseudonym of K. N. Like Mark Twain, K. N. frequently points a moral and displays real philosophy and human understanding through his raillery. Sometimes his light touches and freaks of fancy resemble those of Heine.

Thorleifur Joakimsson, or Jackson, a pioneer of 1876, gathered material on the Icelandic communities in America for about fifty years. He had those qualities of patience and carefulness of detail that are essential to a good research worker, as well as an unusual ability in collating facts.

The Reverend Rognvaldur Petursson has written much that is valuable on both Iceland and the Icelandic communities in America. He has made several trips to the land of his ancestors and thus has kept in close touch with culture in Iceland and through that he has given contributions of great value to the western Icelanders.

Dr. Jon Bjarnason, for twenty-four years president of the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, wrote a very powerful Icelandic

style, in the manner of the classical writers of ancient Iceland. His books were chiefly sermons and other contributions of a religious nature. His contemporary, the Reverend F. J. Bergman, was also a distinguished writer, whose graceful style and graphic descriptions immediately captivate the reader.

Mrs. Jakobina Johnson has translated many beautiful lyrics into English and her poetic muse seems to be equally adept in English and Icelandic.

Mrs. Laura Goodman Salverson brought out in 1923 a novel, *The Viking Heart*, based on Icelandic pioneer life in Canada. It is considered by many authorities to be one of the best novels on pioneer life that have appeared in Canada.

C. H. Thordarson of Chicago, an electrical inventor, came with his parents to America when a very small boy in the early seventies. He has taken out more than a hundred American patents for his inventions and many more in other countries. He invented the first million-volt transformer of electricity. Twice he has received United States government medals for his inventions. His hobby is collecting books and he is considered to have one of the finest private collections in America in English literature and natural science.

In the field of exploration, science, lecturing, and literature Vilhjalmur Stefansson is the most distinguished member of the Icelandic race in America, if not in the world. He has been characterized by Gilbert Grosvenor as one of the greatest explorers of all times. He seems to embody the characteristics of the Vikings, so that in him strength, perseverance, and courage blend with an idealism and imagination that are tempered with good judgment.

In fine art Emile Walters, born in Winnipeg and brought up there and in North Dakota, is putting the lyric quality of Icelandic poetry into paintings that are hung in many well-known museums, including those of Brooklyn and Los Angeles, the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, and the National Gallery at Washington. Mr. Walters devotes himself especially to landscapes, and certain authorities find qualities in his canvases that are similar to those revealed in the work of

Twachtman, the master artist among American landscape painters.

When compiling her book *Saga Islendinga i Nordur-Dakota,* the writer received as a contribution to it a valuable economic survey of the North Dakota settlement covering the period from 1880 to 1924, written by four farmers who had been in the community from the first. These pioneers close their essay thus:[5]

As one looks back over the fifty years of Icelandic pioneering in North Dakota, one cannot fail to admit that much has been accomplished, for now there are smiling fields and attractive homes where formerly there were only a wilderness, uncultivated prairie, and heavy forests. The trials that Icelandic pioneers have had to endure have often been bitter, but they have been granted the redeeming quality of profiting by their struggles in the end in one way or another. We four elderly farmers, who have compiled this survey, cannot wish our descendants anything better than that they too might gain the reputation that the Icelandic pioneers had in former times, — that they were men of their word and dependable in all their manner of conduct.

[5] Jackson, *Saga Islendinga i Nordur-Dakota,* 53.

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